

Enhancing Access to Contraceptives at the University of Pittsburgh

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Submitted to-

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Executive Summary

The University of Pittsburgh contains roughly 19,200 undergraduate students, most between the ages of 18-24. The American College Health Association reports that, as of 2019, roughly 66.9% of American college students on average are sexually active. Sexual health plays a large role in the lives of young adults, from engaging in sexual activity to exploring sexual identity to reserving physical safety. Is it the freedom of students to engage with sexual health resources, especially health services, educational information, and contraception. When accessing contraceptives, it is crucial that students have a variety affordable options. Without proper access and usage, the university is more likely to suffer from health complications among students, the spread of STDs and HIV, and decreased student enrollment due to unplanned

pregnancy. The University of Pittsburgh may improve sexual health and awareness among students by commencing in the sale of contraceptives in on-campus shops and vending machines.

Statement of Problem

Currently, the University of Pittsburgh offers a wide range of sexual health resources within its Student Health Center. Services include treatment for STDs, routine physical exams, pregnancy testing and counseling, sexual assault resources, and prescriptions for contraceptives (“Women’s Health”). In addition, there are several student organizations that focus on providing aid to students in need. Students Engaging in Conversations about Consent and Sexuality, or SECCS, provides a variety of resources, including access to oral contraception, IUDs, Nexplanon, and emergency contraceptives in the University Pharmacy. In addition, the university offers free condoms in the waiting room of the Student Health Center and in the third floor through restroom of the William Pitt Union. While the university may provide contraceptives and other vital resources the Student Health Center and student organizations such as SECCs, student access is limited (Johnson). For one, only condoms are offered as a free contraceptive on campus, and even this is limited to merely two locations that are further impeded by regulated hours of operation. Thus, in order to acquire contraceptives, students must travel to two populated campus locations outside of their dormitory, and only at certain hours. Or else, students must engage with organizations that may cause social anxiety for individuals who are uncomfortable seeking supplies from peers and adults. While the University of Pittsburgh claims to support the use and distribution of contraceptives, on-campus availability does not reflect this ideology.

In addition, the current Covid-19 pandemic creates an additional boundary to accessing contraceptives. Living in a world dominated by Covid means confronting barriers to in-person events and contacts. Students who are vulnerable to the disease, facing quarantine after a potential contact, or afflicted by the disease may not access contraceptives through person-to-person contact. This includes visiting the Student Health Center, attending sex education events or club meetings, and going to off-campus stores and shops. Without an option for a contact-less method of procurement, many students may engage in unsafe sexual practices or else face the detrimental consequences of such practices.

Moreover, lack of accessibility to contraceptives presents a number of critical issues, including the contraction and spread of STDs and HIV, unplanned pregnancies, and ignorance to the benefits of contraceptives. Unplanned pregnancies account for 1 out of every 10 dropouts among female students across community colleges, and for 1 out of every 7 dropouts overall (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy). Students are more likely to use contraceptives if they are easily accessible and affordable. Many may visit the nearest Market To Go in search of condoms, for example, and resolve to other, less-effective methods upon discovering that they are not available within short distance of their dormitory. Limiting contraceptive access to a few select locations and student organizations increases the likelihood of students turning to the pull-out method or coming to the conclusion that a contraceptive is not necessary. To ensure the sexual health and safety of its students, the University of Pittsburgh must provide students with a variety of accessible contraceptives.

Objectives

- Enhance the sexual health and safety of all students
- Increase accessibility to contraceptives on campus
- Access to a variety of affordable options
- Covid-safe manner of acquiring contraceptives
- Sustain student enrollment
- Decrease the spread of STDs and HIV among students

Timetable

- Proposal is reviewed and accepted by the Department of Student Affairs by September 3, 2021
- Survey is composed and disseminated among the student body by September 17, 2021
- Survey results are evaluated by October 8, 2021
- Locations of access and the variety and number of contraceptives is decided by October 22, 2021
- Contraceptives as well as materials for installment are ordered by October 29, 2021
- Vending machines are installed in appropriate locations and contraceptives are placed in campus shops by January 10, 2022

Identifying Student Needs

In order to identify and evaluate students' needs for contraceptives, an anonymous survey will be created and distributed via email to all undergraduate students. The survey will include questions regarding:

- Frequency of sexual activity
- Knowledge of contraceptives
- Knowledge of sexual health issues
- Knowledge of sexual health resources
- Frequency of contraceptive use
- Variety of contraceptive use
- Common worries when purchasing and using contraceptives

The survey will assess students' needs when accessing contraceptives and gather information on the types, number, and locations of contraceptives offered on campus. This information will be used to determine the final design concept and budget of the project.

Design Concept

In order to generate an effective design for the distribution of accessible contraceptives, several events and case studies were taken into consideration. One study, performed by the University of Colorado Boulder, evaluates the 2009 Colorado Family Planning Initiative, a program enabling access to a greater variety of contraception in the state. After following the lives of more than 170,000 women from 2009 to 2015, the study found that birth and abortion rates in Colorado declined by 50% among teens age fifteen to nineteen and by 20% among women age twenty to twenty-four (Marshall). By comparing the educational attainments of 5,050 Colorado women before and after the policy was set in motion, and evaluating the same elements in women of similar age in seventeen other states, the researchers found that overall high school graduation rates increased by 2% due to the program. Improvements among Hispanic women were especially notable, with graduation rates rising about 5% (Marshall). While this study is specific to secondary education and large-scale distribution, the results may be applied to further education and small-scale distribution on college campuses, where access to contraceptives results in a direct increase to graduation rates and a consequential decrease in dropouts.

Furthermore, several universities across the country have worked towards bringing wellness vending machines to their college campuses, including Shippensburg University and the University of Southern Maine. Such machines dispense affordable nonprescription drugs, including emergency and other methods of contraception, to students in need. Of particular importance, these machines offer Plan B, a pill that can prevent pregnancy if taken within seventy-two hours of having unprotected sex (Alptraum). In many pharmacies, access to contraceptives such as Plan B is hindered by “behind-the-counter” status, where some pharmacists may refuse access as they see fit, young adults must face the anxiety of purchasing the pill directly from an authority figure, and excessive costs restrict access as well (Alptraum). Alternatively, schools may subsidize the price of emergency contraception and disperse such medication through accessible vending machines, thus ensuring confidential access to affordable contraception at any hour at a number of convenient locations. These vending machines are crucial to allowing all students, especially survivors of sexual assault, the ability to protect themselves from a potential pregnancy (Planned Parenthood).

Keeping this dissemination strategy and the results of the University of Colorado Boulder study in mind, it would be most beneficial to University of Pittsburgh students if campus Market To Gos and wellness vending machines were stocked with a variety of contraceptives. Several tech companies have produced specialized wellness vending machines, such as a Vengo, which are available for purchase (Alptraum). The University of Pittsburgh will use the survey results to determine the number of machines needed, the number and variety of contraceptives offered inside such machines, and the strategic location of each machine.

Deliverables

- Sexual health and contraceptive usage survey
- Sexual wellness vending machines dispersed around campus
- Affordable contraceptives including: male and female condoms, spermicide, and Plan B pills located within vending machines and within each Market To Go

Budget

- Price per vending machine: ~\$3,100 plus \$15 monthly software charge
- Price to stock each vending machine: dependent on variety and number of contraceptives offered
- Price to stock each Market To Go: dependent on variety and number of contraceptives offered
- Estimated costs per contraceptive:
 - Cost of Plan B: \$35-55
 - Cost of male condoms: \$2-6
 - Cost of female condoms: \$2-6
 - Cost of spermicide: \$8-15
- Consider revenue from contraceptive sales: dependent on variety and number of contraceptives offered, dependent on subsidized prices

Conclusion

Acquiring contraceptives can be both difficult and embarrassing for young adults. With the majority of university students being sexually active with one or more partners each year, it is the duty of the University of Pittsburgh to enable easy and affordable access to contraceptives. As the most accessible campus stores are Market To Gos, these shops must commence the sale of contraceptives such as male and female condoms, spermicide, and Plan-B pills. In addition, confidential access would be enabled by installing a series of vending machines within campus dormitories. Providing easy access to such supplies would strengthen student health and safety as well as decrease dropout rates and create additional university revenue.

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