

Introduction

The 'pill' is one of the milestones of our time. There can be little doubt that it has played a significant role in altering the attitudes and behaviour patterns of a large segment of western society. But putting aside such sociological considerations, we are left with a potential public health problem of considerable magnitude. Large numbers of healthy young women throughout the world are ingesting potent drugs over a period of many years. These drugs suppress ovulation, but they are also known to influence normal metabolism in many different and sometimes subtle ways. That is what this symposium is about.

The possible dangers have been extensively publicized and it is obviously necessary to be aware of the risks. But what are they? Speculation without being backed up with hard information easily leads to sensationalism. If we are to penetrate the emotional veneer which overlies this controversial topic, we need to obtain firm data, both experimental and clinical. It is against such a background that the Association of Clinical Pathologists and the Association of Clinical Biochemists called together a number of leaders in the field to try to evaluate the present state of our knowledge. The proceedings of their deliberations, collected in this volume, appear to be a fair summary of the present situation.

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