family health problems, the sources to which they apply
for help, and their personal assessment of the qualities of
different potential helpers. It demonstrates the central
position of the family doctor, who continues to be the
mothers' mainstay in the case of most troubles, the
exception being financial difficulties and threats of
eviction, seen as the special preserve of the social case-
work centre.

A subsidiary investigation among the workers at the
centre illustrates some of the dissatisfaction and confusion
experienced by the would-be providers of social casework
when their role becomes, in effect, that of a buffer
between the tenant and the 'rent department'.

SEVENTH SESSION (Chairman: Professor E. A. Cheese-
man)

Prospective Study of Women Using Different Methods
of Contraception. M. P. Vessey, Sir Richard Doll,
R. Petö, and C. W. G. Redman (Department of the
Regius Professor of Medicine, Radcliffe Infirmary,
Oxford)

In May 1968, in conjunction with the Family Planning
Association and with financial support from the Medical
Research Council, a long-term follow-up study of
women using different methods of contraception was
started. Seventeen of the Association's best clinics are
now taking part in the project and over 14,000 women are
under observation. About half take oral contraceptives
and half use the diaphragm or the intrauterine device.
During follow-up, information is collected about all
pregnancies and their outcome, all changes in con-
traceptive practices, all visits to hospital (outpatient and
inpatient), and, for those continuing to attend the
clinics, the results of all cervical smears. As far as
possible this information is collected at the clinics, but
as women stop attending for various reasons, contact
with them is maintained by post, telephone, or home
visiting.

Accidental pregnancy rates observed among couples
using the diaphragm or the sheath have been 2.8 and
3.5 per 100 woman-years of use respectively. These
rates are somewhat higher than those observed with oral
contraceptives (0.2) or the intrauterine device (2.0), are
much more favourable than are normally reported,
presumably because family planning clinic attenders
have a high degree of motivation towards contraception.

The outcome of planned pregnancies among women
discontinuing the use of oral contraceptives, the dia-
phragm, or the intrauterine device in order to become
pregnant has been uniformly favourable. Women who
become pregnant while using an intrauterine device,
however, appear to have about a 60% chance of mis-
carrying and about an 8% chance of having an ectopic
pregnancy.

The information obtained so far suggests that on
average the interval to conception is somewhat longer
among women who stop taking oral contraceptives in
order to become pregnant than among women who stop
using other methods of birth control. A much larger
body of data will be needed, however, before this finding
can be fully evaluated.
Newcastle accident survey: social and medical characteristics of patients.
W Morgan

doi: 10.1136/jech.27.1.71-a

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