



AGNES HERMAN

Seniors are effective volunteers

I was a volunteer for Planned Parenthood during the late 1960s. The opportunity evolved into a paid position when they discovered I was a trained counselor. My responsibility was not to talk anyone into having an abortion, but to discuss and plan alternatives. Should a girl or woman become pregnant at the wrong time of life, there are other choices: abstinence, for youngsters specifically; giving a child up for adoption; or raising it with a plan and a support system.

It was my job to help underage girls accept discussion with their parents, but I was not permitted to talk contraception to them without parental permission. I was, however, expected to discuss contraception with adults.

In all cases, it was my responsibility to help women and men understand that abortion is not a method of birth control; we had considerable recidivism in those days. It was before the days of HIV/AIDS; men hesitated to use condoms, and young people were careless and ignorant.

Ninety-six years ago, Margaret Sanger, a New York City nurse, founded Planned Parenthood to provide birth control information and methods. She was distressed at the number of poor women, with an overwhelming number of babies, that she was called upon to treat. Today the agency helps 3 million people every year, and records 2 1/2 million visits for contraception. There is a need; today, 1 in 5 women of varying ages in the United States uses PP for health care.

The health care services that PP offers need to be understood, because many people depend upon this agency. They include birth control services; emergency contraception; general health care; HIV testing; HPV (cervical cancer) and hepatitis vaccine; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered services; men's health services; patient education; pregnancy testing, options and services; sexually transmitted diseases testing and treatment; women's health services.

Abortion accounts for only 3 percent of patient visits nationwide. Since the Hyde Amendment was passed in 1976, it has been illegal to use federal funding for abortion except in three emergency situations: rape, incest or when the mother's health is at risk.

Some folks reject certain options on the list. But will anyone raise a voice against testing for cervical cancer, a killer of women? How about testing for sexually transmitted diseases that cripple, kill men and women? Hepatitis and pregnancy testing are services that anyone might require at one time or another. Planned Parenthood offers them and turns no one away because he/she is poor.

Let me share one of my experiences at Planned Parenthood. A young woman entered the clinic and approached my desk; she glanced around the room and suddenly was gone. I sprinted after her and found her at the elevator in tears.

"I cannot keep my appointment," she said. "Friends of my parents are in that room. They will tell."

When I asked why she had come, she replied, "I need information about not getting pregnant."

Remember, abortions bring only 3 percent of the agency's caseload.

That youngster years ago received help and support when it was safe for her to come in for discussion. Her

See **Herman, E2**

Herman

Continued from Page E1

anonymity was protected until she was able (with our help) to talk to and receive her parents' support.

Why discuss this here? Because volunteering at Planned Parenthood is something that seniors do well. Many of us consider it a duty to share our understanding, compassion and concern for women and men who may be poor, uninsured, confused by the intricacies of today's world.

As elders, we worry about young women whose futures are suddenly disrupted. We want to do something. Volunteers do not interact with pregnant girls at PP; trained staff members are the counselors. But we can help.

Whether by raising money, working in the office, answering the phone or stuffing envelopes, the Friends of Planned Parenthood are able to contribute to the welfare of many women (and men) and to their peace of mind. Volunteer service affects the agency's outreach.

For those who prefer

fundraising to office work, Friends of Planned Parenthood has creative ways of doing so. Since 1978, volunteers in North County have donated clothes, supplied backpacks, sponsored students' trips to Sacramento, staffed information tables at fairs and campuses, provided home tours, etc.

Anyone interested in volunteering at Planned Parenthood can call 619-881-4626. Mary, the liaison, will put you in touch with options.

Agnes Herman is a freelance columnist. Contact her at 760-744-6878; email to aggherman@sbcglobal.net.