



Expert: New Birth Control That Eliminates Periods Is A Bad Idea

Contact: [Lori Wright](#)

603-862-0574

UNH Media Relations

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DURHAM, N.H. – A new birth control pill that will eliminate a woman's monthly menstrual cycle is misguided because for the vast majority of women, it provides a medical solution to a social problem, according to a University of New Hampshire professor who researches medical sociology and gender.

Jean Elson, professor of the sociology of gender and medical sociology at UNH, is available to discuss today's expected FDA approval of the drug Lybrel, which will eliminate a woman's monthly menstrual cycle. **Elson can be reached at 603-659-8473 (home) or 603-988-8815 (cell).**

"Menstrual manipulation appears to be another in a long line of attempts to medicalize women's natural biological life events. The process goes something like this: Some women have problems with a natural body function, like menstruation or menopause; a biochemical treatment is devised; these problems are generalized to include all women who experience that natural body function; and medical treatment is then marketed to all women," Elson says.

"The rationales for using extended-cycle birth control therapy to suppress menstruation include 'hygiene mess,' embarrassment, expense, interference with athletic performance and 'traveling problems.' I am certainly an advocate for making women's lives easier, but I question whether it's appropriate for women to ingest additional hormone medication for what are really social, rather than medical, problems," she says.

"Extended-cycle birth control therapy may have value for a small number of women who experience extraordinary menstrual problems. For most women, however, menstruation is a normal life event, not a medical condition," Elson says. "Employing hormones to curtail normal menstruation strikes me as a very odd mix of feminism and medical authority – women are offered the opportunity to control their own bodies, but what are the real implications?"

"Our cultural beliefs and social arrangements make menstruation more troublesome than it could be. Women would be spared embarrassment if they weren't taught that menstruation is dirty and shameful. They might not find their periods so inconvenient if schools and workplaces provided opportunities for people to rest. And rather than viewing monthly menstruation as a disability, we might celebrate it as symbolic of women's emancipation from the continual pregnancies that disabled earlier generations," she says.



