

# Provera

## drugstore near you

has promised," read a news release from the Toronto Coalition.

"We'd like to see a more open process with public meetings and the release of the information base upon which the government hopes to decide, along with consumer input and consumer representation in such a decision," the DAWN submission *Over Our Dead Bodies* states.

"Too many times drugs have been prematurely approved in the past after intense lobbying by drug companies," says Van Wyck, pointing to the fact that the Advisory Committee on Reproductive Physiology, which has recommended the certification of Depo twice, "has Upjohn people on it."

"We don't need another DES. We

Hell, there are studies that show that celibacy can increase the incidence of breast cancer in some women."

Squires says that if Depo is approved, it will probably be used by women who cannot take the Pill because they are over 35 and/or smoke.

Walters thinks Depo is a "good contraceptive method" for women who are "uneducated." For instance, he says, there are "very few black women in South Africa who would understand how to take the Pill."

But black women in South Africa have charged that the drug is being forcefully administered to them by government funded family planning agencies. Dr. Nthato Motlana, a black South African physician, told the Toronto magazine *Healthshare*

are perhaps a symbolic reminder that agencies such as the IPPF and WHO and companies like Upjohn are not properly informing women about the drug. Many women users of Depo are not even told they are being given the drug, let alone what its possible side effects are.

*Over Our Dead Bodies* documents many cases of handicapped women in Canada that have been administered the drug without their consent. Carolyn Colbourne, a member of DAWN who was on the drug for four years, says they never told her anything about the drug or its side effects. "I didn't have any choice about taking it. How was I going to stop them? I experienced all kinds of side effects while on the drug — depression, loss of appetite, kidney

not going to know whether Depo-Provera is safe," he explains, "until a large number of women use it for a very long time."

But as the DAWN submission says, are enough causes of disability already. Much as we like ourselves, we don't wish to see our numbers increased."

A drug company's capacity to use underprivileged women around the world as "human garbage cans" depends on the maintenance of peoples' ignorance. Closed and unpublicized meetings along with a dirth of information about the drug, serve that purpose. As the Advisory Council on the Status of Women points out in a news release, "the open participation of consumers and interest groups and others is essential for the balanced consideration of ethical, psychological and sociological issues" with respect to the pending decision on Depo-Provera.

Dr. Squires says he has "problems with people who intermix sociology and medicine." He says doctors are better qualified to judge whether a woman should use Depo — "should we listen to the experts or special interest groups who have some sociological reasons for feeling this drug is not appropriate for women to use?" he asks.

But because of the "potential for the drug to be misused," says Dr. Marion Powell of the Toronto Bay Centre for Birth Control, "it is far too important an issue to be left in the hands of the medical profession."

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haemorrhage..."

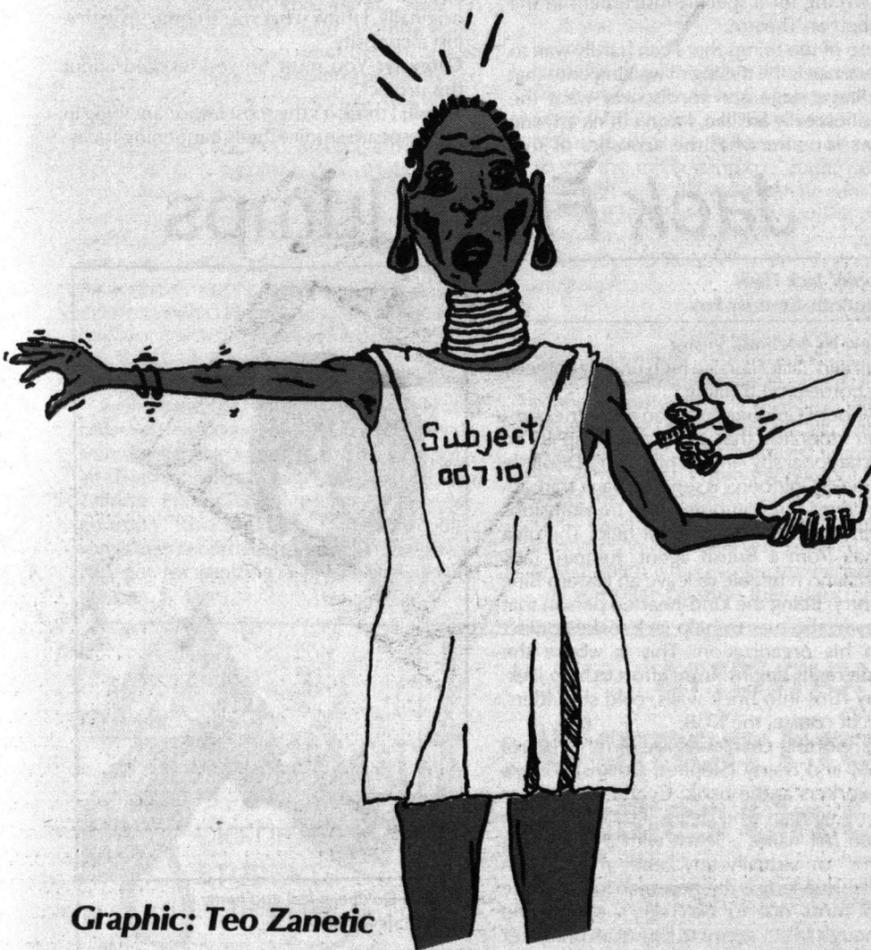
Colbourne said most of the women at her institution had been put "there drug to "stop their menstruation for the convenience of the caretakers" without their informed consent. "It's wrong to put these women on a dangerous drug when they have no choice. It is wrong to use people as guinea pigs, which we were."

As DAWN's submission to the panel points out, women who have used Depo do "not even get the same opportunity male sex offenders do to give informed consent." A copy of the consent form rapists are asked to sign before being administered Depo contains a lengthy explanation of all the possible side effects of the drug. The consent form was printed in the Feb., 1985 issue of *Modern Medicine of Canada* and lists such adverse effects as "inability to concentrate, depressed mood,

**Depo is a "good contraceptive method" for women who are "uneducated."**

loss of hair, inflammation of the veins" and "the possible development of cancer and blood clots."

Notwithstanding, doctors like Dr. Malcolm Potts, the present director of the International Fertility Research Programme and former IPPF medical director, insists the drug must be given to millions of women over the course of decade before its carcinogenic effects can be judged. "We are



Graphic: Teo Zanetic

don't need another Thalidomide," says DAWN's submission. "And the general public doesn't either."

But Dr. Jack Walters, an Ottawa gynecologist and the chair of the Advisory Committee, says women opposed to the drug are "overreacting." According to all scientific data on the drug, he says, the drug is as safe as the Pill.

The vice president of Upjohn Co. of Canada agrees with Walters. "The drug is relatively safe," says Dr. Douglas Squires. "I'm not saying that side effects do not occur — they absolutely could occur and this drug may not be appropriate for some women. But even aspirin has side effects . . .

ing in the fall of 1982 that Depo-Provera shots are being given to young black girls "without even asking their consent."

Meanwhile, at an IPPF-sponsored clinic in Thailand, 60,000 women have received Depo injections. "Each woman was given the time to make her 'free choice' and have her injection — 60 to 90 seconds. At the Khao I Dang refugee camp, women who agreed to be injected were promised a chicken — a powerful inducement in a camp where refugees are fed about four ounces of meat a week," the article in *Healthshare* pointed out.

The closed meetings in Canada

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Depo-Provera critics say women must be better informed of contraceptive methods and consulted in decision making, as they are the ones most affected by drugs like Depo-Provera. Although men control most information on Depo and regulate its use throughout the world, women are calling on the government to heed their concerns, and to put more time, money and energy into finding safer, surer methods of birth control.

But is the government listening?