

THE SEX EDUCATION CONTROVERSY

(Originally published October 1969)

In our *Bulletin* and in pages of recent AMA journals, a considerable controversy has been generated over the question of sex education.

There is a genuine and sincere difference of opinion on the matter. An editorial in the *JAMA*, endorsing sex education programs for all segments of the school population, and characterizing opponents as right wingers and uninformed individuals, drew some heated replies. In one issue, 13 letters were printed: 10 protesting, 3 supporting. Apparently involved is not only the newer concept of sex education, but the basic social philosophy behind it.

The proponents invariably bring out that right-wing organizations like the John Birch Society and the Christian Crusade are lined up against the teaching of sex in the schools. This support, however, should have no more bearing on the issue than that of the National Council of Churches, the Young Communist League and other left-wing organizations favor of it. If you are going to point out that there are extremists on one side, you should be willing to recognize extremists on the other.

The plain fact is that there is controversy. Many well-meaning, intelligent and informed people from all walks of life, including the medical profession, are speaking out on each side of the question. Unlike the fluoridation quarrel, there is no predominance of kooks on one side.

Our own attitude toward an organized required program of school education from kindergarten on, as is being pushed by SIECUS with the approval of the AMA, is one attended by mixed feelings. We are acutely aware of the increase in teenage marriages, the unwanted babies, the rising rates of illegitimacy, venereal diseases and the widespread breakdown of morality. We don't like it a bit and would like to see all of these trends reversed.

We will agree with A. J. Kravtin that the situation is deplorable and fast getting out of hand. We will agree that, ideally, sex education of children is a parental responsibility and that the place to teach it is in the home. We will also agree that the topic is a difficult one for discussion between parent and child and that many parents fail to meet their responsibility. We wonder, however, whether his assumption is correct when he places the blame for today's situation entirely on parental failure and inadequate home guidance.

One can, of course, point out that until 1930, the problem was not one of major, national importance and that until that time parental and home instruction in sexual matters apparently managed it adequately. Then from 1930 on, with the introduction of progressive theory, social adjustment and sex education into the school systems, there has been a steady and significant deterioration in sexual behavior.

In other words, one can argue, with some justification, that it is because we have

been attempting to teach sex in the schools for more than 30 years, and because we have exaggerated its importance and focused the attention of several generations of students on it that the present disturbing condition exists.

Nevertheless, we can still agree that something should be done about it. We're not sure, however, that the solution being offered by SIECUS is either correct or that it will work—therefore, the controversy.

It is extremely difficult to see how such an idealistically conceived program for all segments of the school population could be supervised properly, or where all of the "carefully selected, properly prepared, exemplary individuals" to teach the new sex will be found. Even allowing that this can be accomplished, is there reason to think that it would have any significant effect as long as there are no restraints imposed on what our young see and hear and read daily in books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television and movies? If you live in a society so overly concerned with civil liberties and "rights" that it tolerates intercourse on the screen, four letter words in print, and pornography through the mails, how do you overcome the Playboy philosophy? It seems naive to think that curious, immature pre and post pubertal children will absorb much Boy Scout sexual morality from exemplary teachers in school, when they can obtain exciting and more stimulating sex knowledge so readily outside of school.

We have the uneasy feeling that the SIECUS plan for sex education is another one of those fuzzily conceived social programs which denies heredity and the instinctual behavior of man, and believes that all solutions come only through training and environment. (Dr. Mary Calderon, SIECUS head, was quoted recently, as saying that there is nothing hereditary about our sexual attitudes, and that we develop our sexual pattern, homo or hetero, as the case may be, entirely from our early experiences with parents and home environment.) For four decades now we have accepted nearly all of the social improvement plans espoused by liberal activists: social security, slum clearance, welfare subsidies, and many others. All were advanced and hailed as ultimate, modern answers to society's problems. After forty years, all of the same problems remain with us, now increased to monstrous proportions. The liberal activists are still with us, and they still adhere dogmatically to the same sociologic tenets and methods of almost half a century ago. Undaunted by poor results or outright failure, they always insist we try the same methods again and again on broader more expensive scales.

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "Doctor's Lounge", Oct 1969, Vol. XVI No.10, p.14