

Ethics after Hours

Robot uteruses and the quest to end unintended pregnancy

By *The Impact -Vox*

Summary

Upstream USA is a non-profit organization established in Delaware, USA, in 2014 to help health clinics provide various birth control options to their patients. The Upstream program provides training to clinicians in insertions of long acting reversible contraceptives (LARC), such as intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants. Robotic uteruses are used for the purpose of training clinicians in insertions of IUDs. Technicians and front desk staff are also provided training, so they are well equipped to answer questions from patients. Research in the USA has shown that the use of LARCs is more effective in preventing pregnancy than birth control pills.

Upstream USA's work is supported by policies such as the Affordable Care Act, which ensured that all women have access to preventative health benefits for free - including contraception. By making LARCs more accessible to women, these policies have reduced the teen pregnancy rate and the abortion rate. But under the current US government the future of these policies is uncertain.

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Video link: <https://www.vox.com/2017/11/20/16667916/unintended-pregnancy-policy-birth-control-mandate-contraception-access>

Discussion questions:

- Upstream USA's objective is to reduce the rate of unplanned pregnancies and increase the patient's choice. Their work include promoting the use of LARCs, including both implants and IUDs as research evidence points to these as the most effective types of birth control. What was your initial thoughts of Upstream's approach when you heard the podcast?
- Do you believe that Upstream's approaches are likely to achieve their objectives?
- Some opponents of Upstream's work are concerned with having policies in place that tend to promote the use LARCs (in particular the use of intrauterine devices). Do you think these concerns are justified? Why/why not?
- Do you think contraceptives should be free?
- What ethical concerns arise about provision of birth control? For example, Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, made statements in support of eugenics movements in the early twentieth century.