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For Immediate Release

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American Public Health Association Adopts Policy to Ensure That Women Can Have Contraceptive Prescriptions Filled at Pharmacies

PHILADELPHIA, PA (December 13, 2005) – The 30,000-member American Public Health Association’s Governing Council formally adopted a policy entitled “Ensuring That Women Can Have Contraceptive Prescriptions Filled at Pharmacies” today at the association’s annual meeting.

“This is the most comprehensive policy yet adopted by a national health organization on this issue,” stated MergerWatch Director Lois Uttley. “It was the product of a team of people including reproductive health advocates, a pharmacist, public health experts and lawyers.”

The policy makes clear that only a minority of pharmacists are engaging in the practice of refusing to fill contraceptive prescriptions based on religious or moral objections. In adopting the policy, APHA praised those pharmacists who are taking positive steps to increase women’s access to contraception at the pharmacy through collaborative practice agreements and education of pharmacists about contraception.

The policy sets forth a clear position on the need to protect patients’ rights and access to prescribed medication in the face of pharmacist refusals:

“APHA takes the position that the patient’s health and well-being must come first in health care delivery and in the formulation of health policy. When a health professional has prescribed contraception, the patient must be able to obtain the contraceptive in a timely manner at licensed pharmacy, without interference from those pharmacists who have personal objections to contraception. Any delay caused by such interference can endanger the patient’s health by increasing the risk of unintended pregnancy or

exacerbating the other medical conditions for which contraceptives are sometimes prescribed.”

Members of the APHA’s Population, Family Planning and Reproductive Health Section contributed to the drafting of the new policy. Among them were representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union Reproductive Freedom Project, National Health Law Program, National Women’s Law Center, Pharmacy Access Partnership, MergerWatch and the Center for Reproductive Rights, and a pharmacist from the University of Washington Department of Pharmacy.

“APHA is the nation’s oldest and largest public health organization, and is a respected source of policy on public health issues,” continued Uttley. “This is an important victory. It demonstrates that access to family planning is a key component to healthy lives.”

Because the policy was brought up as a “late-breaker” responding to an emerging issue, it becomes interim policy until the next annual meeting of the APHA. The policy will come up for a final vote as permanent policy in November of 2006.

See the APHA’s press release at
<http://www.apha.org/news/press/2005/concludes133rdAnnualMeeting.htm>

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