

Abortion pills before pregnancy

By Daniel Grossman

GROWING UP, one of the first things I learned about sex was to always be prepared. As a young man coming of age in the 1980s, that meant having a condom in my pocket.

There are many more options for preventing pregnancy and infections today: new hormonal birth control methods, external and internal condoms, dental dams, emergency contraception and medication that reduces one's risk of contracting HIV.

As threats to legal abortion mount and access to abortion care becomes more limited in parts of the country, there's another option we should be adding to the list: abortion pills in advance of pregnancy.

The idea is simple: Give women abortion pills *before* they need them — "advance provision," as it's known — to take as soon as a pregnancy is discovered. Women could get the pills from their gynecologist at the time of their annual exam, say, or the pills could be made available online.

There's at least one significant obstacle, however. The Food and Drug Administration has not approved abortion pills for advance provision. The agency doesn't even allow clinicians to prescribe mifepristone, one of the two drugs that make up medication abortion, for pick-up at a pharmacy.

These restrictions are out of touch with patient preferences and medically unnecessary. They also limit women's access to much-needed care.

According to new research I conducted with several colleagues, women in the United States are interested in having easier access to abortion pills.

In our nationally representative survey of more than 7,000 women between the ages of 18 and 49, nearly half (49%) supported one of three access models for obtaining abortion pills, and 30% said they were personally interested in one of the three models.

On advance provision specifically, 44% of respondents supported the model and 22% said they were personally interested. Of the 78% of women who said they supported abortion rights, 57% were in favor of advance provision of abortion pills.

In the survey, women noted several advantages to advance provision. It's more private and convenient, for instance, and it would allow them to access abortion care earlier in their pregnancy. They also noted disadvantages: concerns about safety, patients taking the pills incorrectly, and the fact that they would be having an abortion without seeing a clinician.

As a physician, I have few medical concerns about handing out abortion pills in advance. Patients could be screened ahead of time for some of the rare conditions that might make it less safe to take the pills.

Patients with regular periods who miss one could take the pills as soon as they have a positive pregnancy test. Those with irregular periods, or who were unsure of how far along the pregnancy was, would need to be evaluated first, since medication abortion is recommended only up until 10 weeks of pregnancy.

Before it became available over the counter, emergency contraception, which prevents pregnancy after unprotected sex, was commonly prescribed or handed out by clinicians to patients who might need it in the future.

Even now, we commonly prescribe Ella, an emergency contraceptive pill that still requires a prescription, in advance. In many parts of the world, emergency contraceptive and abortion pills are already available in pharmacies without a prescription. Our research in Peru, where abortion is legally restricted, found that women were able to use abortion pills safely and effectively on their own with minimal involvement of a clinician.

For advance provision of abortion pills to be scaled, we do need more research demonstrating the safety and effectiveness of the strategy. Our research program plans to start such a study next year.

Just as advance provision helped move emergency contraception toward eventual approval for over-the-counter sale, evidence about how women use abortion pills when they obtain them in advance could strengthen the case for making them available without a prescription.

But there are some other potential obstacles, including cost. Mifepristone, the first of two drugs that are used to induce an early abortion, has a price tag of about \$70. (The second drug, misoprostol, costs about \$5.)

Unless the price of mifepristone is reduced or medical insurance covers the pill, it is unlikely that advance provision of abortion pills would be widely adopted. Given that the majority of people seeking abortion have low incomes, concerns about cost deserve careful consideration.

Some people in the U.S. are already taking matters into their own hands and looking for websites that will help them access the drugs, which may put them at legal risk.

As health professionals, we have a responsibility to find novel strategies to better meet the needs of our patients. Especially now, this includes advance provision of abortion pills.

DANIEL GROSSMAN is a professor in the obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences department at UC San Francisco and the director of Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, a research program at the university.

FOR THE RECORD

Mueller inquiry: An article on the Nov. 20 Op-Ed page incorrectly identified political commentator Jerome Corsi as Joseph Corsi.



NICK UT Associated Press



LES DUNSETH

VOTING RIGHTS champions Antonio Gonzalez, top, seen in his office in Boyle Heights in 2004, and professor Leo Estrada earlier this year at UCLA.

They put azul in the blue wave

GUSTAVO ARELLANO

HUNDREDS of thousands of midterm votes are still being counted across the United States, but you can already verify this result: The Democratic blue wave contained a lot of azul.

The national Democratic Party, which — after ignoring Latinos for too long — wised up and spent more than \$30 million to get out the *voto* and turnout was 174% higher than in the 2014 midterms. A record number of Latinos — Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, South Americans — will enter Congress. In California, victories by two Latinos from the Central Valley, Anna Caballero and Melissa Hurtado, helped restore the Democrats' super-majority in the state Senate.

This surge in Latino political power is a credit to the activists who laid its foundation in the 1980s and 1990s. Two of them, both Angelenos, died earlier this month: civil rights activist Antonio Gonzalez and UCLA professor Leo Estrada. Their passings barely registered in local and national media, but their fingerprints were all over the Democrats' 2018 success.

Gonzalez was the longtime leader of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project and its policy arm, the William C. Velasquez Institute. A 2005 profile in Time Magazine — which named him as one of the 25 most influential Latinos in the U.S. — described Gonzalez's philosophy best: "democracy as trench warfare."

The SVREP was created to register Latino voters across the United States, regardless of political affiliation. Whether you were a fifth-generation Chicano or someone whose parents were in the country illegally, Gonzalez wanted you to participate in the grand American experiment. So he did everything to make sure that happened. He worked Capitol Hill but also went door-to-door in barrios across the country registering people.

He taught newbies the ins and outs of American politics, community activism and running for office. And once Latinos stepped inside the corridors of power, Gonzalez pushed them to work on big issues — such as the war on drugs and environmental justice — that may not have been obvious choices, but directly affected Latino communities.

Gonzalez even understood the importance of community journalism: Despite an impossibly busy schedule, he hosted a weekly one-hour show on radio station KPFF from 2004 to 2016, using his platform to let local, national and international activists explain their struggles on the air to a Southern California audience.

"Chipping away, pushing, prodding," Gonzalez told Time back in 2005 about his work strategy. "We've created a new culture of participation."

Estrada was even lesser known than Gonzalez — yet in some ways, more influential. The El Paso native started at

UCLA in 1977 and helped to transform the school's urban planning department into one of the most vital in the United States. Through his work on demographics in the Southwest and how it played out politically, Estrada got Latino progressives to realize that activism couldn't come just from the streets, but also academia.

In an appreciation published by UCLA when Estrada retired earlier this year, he recalled asking a dean at the university if it was OK for academics to involve themselves in local affairs.

"I think our faculty in the field of planning should be in the community, so you do what you have to do," Estrada's boss told him. "Try not to get arrested."

He took those words to heart, and helped to break down the ivory tower by teaching a generation of scholars that their work had concrete, on-the-ground application — and wasn't just for stuffy university journals.

The proof led by example. He worked on the Christopher Commission that examined the Los Angeles Police Department policies in the wake of the Rodney King beating and advocated for reforms such as community policing. Government officials used his demographic breakdowns of political districts to better allocate funds toward Latinos. The American Civil Liberties Union and other nonprofits used his data to craft lawsuits that alleged disenfranchisement of Latino voters across the country. His consulting was crucial in the voting rights case Garza vs. Los Angeles County, the federal court decision that led to a redrawing of county supervisorial districts and helped Gloria Molina become the first non-white to become a county supervisor.

Just as crucial was what Estrada did quietly: mentor scores of former students who went on to become professors, nonprofit workers and activists, whether with a letter of recommendation or a pep talk when they needed it the most. Dozens posted testimonials about his grace and genius on social media. "The modern scholar of color 'doesn't have time' to work with the next generation," said Alejandro Jose Gradilla, a professor of Chicano Studies at Cal State Fullerton. "Estrada did it over and over again without blinking."

Estrada and Gonzalez were never in the spotlight like, say, former L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa or longtime labor leader and newly minted state Senator Maria Elena Durazo. Yet they were California at its best: always looking to better the future of the downtrodden.

When the Democrats take power in Sacramento and Washington in January, party leaders should hold a moment of silence in their honor.

And for anyone else who wants to show our respect? Easy. Vote. Then register someone to do the same.

mexicanwithglasses@gmail.com
Twitter: @GustavoArellano

Nostalgia that's baked right in

Green-bean casserole is the Thanksgiving classic invented in a 1950s corporate kitchen.

By Laura Shapiro

Nobody showed up at the first Thanksgiving carrying a green-bean casserole. Whatever was on the menu at that semi-mythical gathering it didn't include a dish made with string beans, canned cream of mushroom soup, a bit of soy sauce and canned french-fried onions. And yet, along with the turkey and cranberries we've enshrined as the culinary symbols of Plymouth colony, millions of home cooks will make green-bean casserole this year, a dish bearing every hallmark of its 20th-century origins. Introduced in 1955 as "Green Bean Bake," by the end of that decade it had become a holiday icon, right up there with pilgrim hats.

It's a remarkable trajectory for a casserole born in a corporate test kitchen. Typically we're reluctant to alter our holiday menus, packed as they are with memory and tradition. But no sooner had families across the country tasted green-bean casserole than they started saving space for it on the sideboard as faithfully as if they'd gotten the recipe from Great-Grandma.

Dorcas Reilly, the Campbell Soup Co. home economist who invented green-bean casserole, died last month at the age of 92. But happily for historians, her working notes on the project survive, typed up with some handwritten additions on a card headed "Vegetable — Oven" that the company donated to the National Inventors Hall of Fame. She started her experiments at the request of Cedely Brownstone, the food editor at the Associated Press. Brownstone had attended a press luncheon where "a simple casserole of green beans with an intriguing topping" caught everyone's attention. She especially liked the backstory: On a trip to the U.S., the shah of Iran and his wife, Queen Soraya, had been served the same casserole, and the queen said she loved it. Brownstone asked Campbell's to help her devise an easy recipe for the dish, suitable for home cooks using packaged foods, and Reilly took up the challenge.

She tested version after version — was it better with celery salt? Or maybe Worcestershire sauce? Was a quarter-teaspoon of soy sauce enough? "Needs more pep so I stirred in extra soy sauce," Reilly wrote. Several of her co-workers tasted the results, and it was one of these tasters, identified in Reilly's notes only as "EH," who came up with the inspired notion of including french-fried onions in the soup mixture as well as sprinkling them on top.

Brownstone published her story on April 21, 1955 ("Beans Fit for a Queen of Iran"), and although Reilly continued to tinker with the recipe for years, the dish was launched.

But notice the date of Brownstone's story. This was a springtime recipe; Thanksgiving was nowhere in sight. Yet four years later, in November 1959, Ruth Ellen Church, the food editor at the Chicago Tribune, was reporting on what had already become "the popular treatment" for Thanksgiving string beans: Just bake them in mushroom soup with canned onion rings on top. Reilly's invention, a plain-spoken homage to convenience and crunch, had leapt to classic status.

Why green-bean casserole, of all possible candidates for immortality? The Campbell's test kitchen was constantly turning out canned-soup recipes, many of them quite a bit more arresting than this one. Asparagus soup turned up in a cheese souffle, tomato soup was the operative ingredient in a molded gelatin salad, cream-of-mushroom soup was mixed with ground meat to become the filling for a French-toast sandwich — but none of these outlived their novelty.

Similarly, there are innumerable ways to serve green beans, but few can compete with the casserole on Thanksgiving. Tossing green beans with butter and slivered almonds, for instance, which Ruth Ellen Church suggested as an alternative, is easier; it's also more elegant and doesn't take up room in the oven. Never mind. Thanksgiving isn't about elegance, it's about America. Green-bean casserole appeals to a deeply characteristic streak in our national appetite, a sensibility that brings us back to packaged foods even when we think we've cut the ties.

Farmers markets, seasonal produce, "fresh and local" — these mantras are relatively recent preoccupations. Packaged foods, by contrast, are woven into our culinary DNA. What delighted the immigrants arriving at Ellis Island wasn't fresh vegetables, but canned peaches, and fluffy white bread as sweet as cake. Those were the miracle foods that told newcomers they had arrived in the land of plenty, and the foods that shaped our tastes for generations. When Reilly and her team approved a just-right version of green-bean casserole, it was because they recognized a beloved old friend — the nostalgia was baked in.

"All liked," Reilly wrote on the card. We still do.

Culinary historian LAURA SHAPIRO is the author of "Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America."

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**Patt Morrison Asks
Das Williams**

A law the supervisor co-wrote as a state legislator makes it easier to lock up guns than potentially dangerous gun owners.