

138. Medical Ethics

Norman Haire, a graduate of the University of Sydney, was, in the early 1920s, among the medical practitioners in England who advocated birth control. He was medical officer at two birth-control clinics in London and by his writings and lectures made information about contraception available to a lay audience. When he returned to Sydney at the beginning of the Second World War, he was appalled by the ignorance he found there regarding birth control, and sexuality and his efforts to rectify this situation were frustrated by the reticence imposed by the ethics of the medical profession.

It is difficult to say just to what extent Australia's low birth-rate is due to the use of contraceptive methods. Indeed, the knowledge of reliable and harmless contraceptive methods seems to be limited, in this country, to a very few people. In Europe

and particularly in Great Britain, books and pamphlets which give the best scientific knowledge available, in language understandable by the ordinary man or woman, are circulated freely. Doctors are free to write for lay readers and lecture for lay audiences, and many of them, including some leaders of the profession, do so frequently all over the country. The various birth-control groups have established scores of clinics where women may be examined by qualified doctors specially trained for this purpose and instructed by them in contraceptive methods. About twelve years ago the British Minister of Health issued a circular authorizing doctors at the Health Centres throughout the country, which are paid out of the government funds, to give contraceptive advice to married women, whose health is such, permanently or temporarily, that it would be damaged by pregnancy or childbirth. A few medical schools and many birth-control clinics train medical students and doctors in the technique of contraception. Contraceptive appliances are sold cheaply . . .

In Australia the position is quite different. Medical ethics here do not permit the doctor to write on medical matters, under his own name, in other than purely medical journals.

If he publishes books on medical matters for the ordinary reader, there are severe restrictions on their advertisements and sale. He may not lecture on medical matters to lay audiences.

Norman Haire, *Sex Problems of Today* (1942).