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Women are guinea pigs in contraceptive trial

By Sakina Yusuf Khan

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NEW DELHI: Women in the third world have long been guinea pigs for, new types of contraceptives. The latest one concerns the insertion of **quinacrine**, a method believed to be more dangerous than the **controversial** Norplant.

A pioneer of this "technique" in the country is Dr Biral Mullick. Scores of women from villages and slums in and around Calcutta are **flocking** to his clinic at 34A, Shashi Bhushan Dey Street. They go back gratified **because** no one, not even their husbands, will know they have been sterilised!

The method appears convenient -- no **anaesthesia**, no surgery, no hospitalisation. Just seven pellets of a cheap and easily available anti malarial medicine called quinaerine, which is inserted in the uterus. The woman is then promised a lifetime of release from unwanted **pregnancies**. The **cost** is a mere Rs 35.

What these women do not know is that they are guinea pigs being used to test the efficacy of the drug; that they are being **subjected** to a method not approved by any drug regulatory authority in the world, and against which the World Health Organisation has issued stern warnings.

Laboratory tests have indicated that quinaerine causes mutation of cells. Further tests are on to assess if it is carcinogenic as well.

Dr Mullick's clinic is not the only one in the country carrying out

these **chemical** "trials". Says gynaecologist Puneet Bedi, "Scores of private doctors and NGOs across the country, including a prominent doctor politician from Delhi, are involved in this unethical practice. It's a very disturbing development.*"

According to him, most of the women come to these clinics for a Copper T and are sent back instead with **quinacrine**, a corroding agent that burns the uterine tissue and forms scars. The **inflammatory** response results in the formation of scar tissues blocking the fallopian tubes and leading to irreversible sterilisation.

"It's a **method** which has a barbaric history going back to the Nazi concentration camps," says Dr Mohan Rao, chairperson of the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, JNU.

According to Prof Shree Muley of McGill University, Canada, the **method** is most crude, imprecise and could lead to tubal pregnancy, and internal haemorrhage which could be fatal. Not **surprisingly** then, it has been banned in Chile and Vietnam.

In India, however, it is being used by an increasing number of **unscrupulous** doctors. "What is more disturbing," says Dr Rao is that the "trials" are being largely sponsored by two U.S. doctors, Stephen Mumford and Elton Kessel (both head single-man NGOs), who receive funds from the right wing anti-immigration lobby in America which believes that population explosion in the third world will consume their **resources, overrun their borders and ultimately cause a crisis in their country.**"