

World of Women

Oakland Tribune Fri., Oct. 27, 1972 31

'Self-Help' Proponents To Speak at Tribunal

By JO MURRAY
Tribune Staff Writer

There's relatively little controversy these days about whether women should have the vote or get equal pay for equal work.

But if you want to get into a good discussion, start talking the degree of control that women have over their bodies, particularly when it comes to birth control and abortions.

Carrying the issue a step farther, a group of women in Los Angeles recently started giving each other gynecological examinations.

The subject is still a question mark for almost everyone, including the law. But legal answers, at least, may come out of last month's arrest of Carol Downer and Colleen Wilson, who are charged with practicing medicine without a license at the Feminist Women's Health Collective in Los Angeles.

Ms. Downer, who is specifically accused of conducting examinations and diagnosing and treating infections, was in town this week along with two other staff members for a series of speaking engagements, including this weekend's Women's Abortion Tribunal in Berkeley. She is now free on \$500 bail.

They stopped by the Tribune to talk about their activities, which have implications for the future plans of self-help clinics around the state. Ms. Downer, Lorraine Rothman and Francie Hornstein were accompanied by Laura Brown, a University of California student active in the Oakland clinic.

"When we started the clinic, we asked several lawyers what we could do legally," Ms. Downer explained. "And they told us that the laws were so vague it would take a test case to find out.

"The law defines practicing medicine as diagnosing and treating a disease. So half the mothers in the country could be charged for diagnosing that their children had the measles," she added.

The clinic admittedly is doing more than diagnosing measles or handing out aspirin for colds.

But Ms. Downer said they will not provide examinations (or menstrual extraction, a procedure developed at the L.A. clinic and probably its

most controversial activity) for anyone who walks in.

"Self-examination is something we've done among our own group," she said. "It's not something we've offered as a service to the community. We're totally against the concept of patients, but everyone wants to somehow cast us in that mold."

None of the four had any formal medical training although Ms. Rothman has worked in biology laboratories.

She and Ms. Downer, who are both married and have a total of ten children, were the typical mothers working with Girl Scouts and day care centers until they became involved in the center's abortion counseling program three years ago.

They met Ms. Hornstein dur-

ing a speaking engagement in Iowa City, and she left her job in a day care program there to join the self-help clinic last April. Ms. Brown, who previously had worked with the L.A. clinic, is majoring in economics at Berkeley.

"When we were working with abortions, we found out that we really didn't know enough about our own bodies," Ms. Downer recalled. "We're very interested in establishing what female paramedics can do, and in learning how to evaluate and implement good medical care."

The four, who still pay regular visits to doctors themselves, say their goal is not to do away with gynecologists but to enable women to find out what conditions require a doc-

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L. A. police arrested Carol Downer



Francie Hornstein came from Iowa City



Lorraine Rothman had worked in a lab



Laura Brown is with Oakland clinic

Tribune photos by Keith Dennison

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tor's care and to ask more intelligent questions when they do go.

It's little more than an extension of the mother's traditional role of deciding when to treat a sore throat at home and when to send the child to the doctor, they say.

They'll be telling more about their experiences at the Tribunal on Abortion, Contraception and Forced Sterilization.

The program opens tonight at 8 p.m. with a speech by Dr. Barbara Roberts, national coordinator of Women's National Abortion Action Coalition, and presentation of "But What Have You Done for Me Lately?" a play by Myrna Lamb.

Women will be invited to testify beginning tomorrow at 9:30 a.m. Meetings will be at Boalt Hall School of Law's Booth Auditorium.