Embracing post-fertilisation methods of family planning: a call to action

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ABSTRACT
Family planning methods that act after fertilisation would have substantial benefits: they could be used longer after sex than current emergency contraceptives, and potentially a woman could use them only on relatively rare occasions when her menstrual period is delayed. Although such methods would displease abortion opponents, they would likely be welcomed by many women. Research to develop post-fertilisation fertility control agents should be pursued.

Background
Family planning methods that act after fertilisation have considerable appeal. Compared to currently available contraceptives, which are all designed primarily to keep sperm and egg apart, drugs that would act during or after union of these gametes might offer notable advantages. If used postcoitally, such drugs would be effective later after sex than emergency contraceptives that work only if taken before ovulation,1 and therefore they could serve more women and provide more benefit at a population level. A woman could potentially use a post-fertilisation method on a planned schedule only once in each menstrual cycle, no matter how many prior coital acts she had had in that cycle. If the drug were effective when administered after implantation of an embryo, timing would be flexible, and she might even be able to limit its use on average to a few times a year when her menstrual period was late. Importantly, post-fertilisation methods would eliminate the conceptual and logistical challenge of needing to obtain and initiate contraception before having sex, which …