

18 September 1982

Black women used as guinea pigs: Foley

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CANBERRA. — The Federal Government is investigating complaints that a drug banned as a contraceptive is being promoted in a family planning kit for Aboriginal women in Queensland.

The Government has been told that the kit includes a poster of a woman being injected in the bottom with the drug Depo-Provera. The Australian drug evaluation committee has rejected an application for the use of the drug as a contraceptive.

The "Teaching Kit on Family planning" is being distributed by the Queensland Health Department. It also refers to the pill, spermicidal creams and foams, natural birth control and condoms.

A spokesman for the Federal Minister for Health, Mr Carlton, said last night that the complaints were justified "it would appear that the Queensland Health Department had acted unwisely".

The spokesman said the Federal Health Department was investigating the complaints.

The secretary of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, Mr Gary Foley, said Aboriginal people could only conclude that black women in Queensland were being "cynically exploited as guinea pigs for an unsafe drug which is not allowed for use among white women as a contraceptive." He said the kit listed the drug as "second choice to the pill".

The former Minister for Health Mr MacKellar, told Parliament in August last year that the drug was available in Australia in the treatment of a number of indications "including malignant neoplasia and precocious puberty".

The spokesman said the Federal Health Department was investigating the complaints.

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The spokesman for Mr Carlton said yesterday that similar restrictions on the use of the drug applied in the United States. The use of Depo-Provera for contraceptive purposes would be limited to clinical investigation use only he said.

The Queensland Health Minister, Mr Austin, said yesterday that there was no suggestion that health workers were taking risks with the health of Aboriginal women.

He said Depo-Provera could be provided only to Aboriginal women on the advice of a doctor and only when the doctor was certain it was suitable for that particular woman.