Missed opportunities in discussing LARC

We conducted a study on the feasibility of self-completed history questionnaires in a central London community contraceptive clinic in October 2006. Participants were established users of combined hormonal contraception (CHC, which includes the pill and the patch) requesting repeat supplies.\(^1\) Along with questions on personal and family history to identify risk factors, we included a question: “Would you like to discuss other methods of contraception such as long-acting methods which you do not have to remember to take each day?” Twenty-one percent (68/328) of women replied “yes” to this question. This is an important finding, considering the fact that these women were already well established on their CHC.

Given this response, we suggest that when a woman comes for repeat supplies of her CHC, it should be taken as an opportunity to discuss long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) methods. Choice of contraception is essential to meet diverse user needs, and preferences may change over the course of a woman’s life.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance recommends that all women requiring contraception should be given information about, and offered a choice of, all methods, including LARC.\(^2\) Little is known about the extent to which women requesting contraception are actually offered these methods. In general practice the availability of LARC methods is often limited, which is also likely to affect uptake.\(^3\)

LARC offers definite cost benefits to health services, with all methods being more cost-effective than the combined oral contraceptive pill even at 1 year of use.\(^4\) In addition, these methods offer non-contraceptive health benefits, such as the levonorgestrel intrauterine system providing treatment for menorrhagia.\(^5\)

The use of contraception places a heavy financial burden on society and public funds.\(^6\) In the UK, an estimated 50% of pregnancies are unplanned and approximately one-fifth of conceptions end in legal abortions.\(^7\) An increased uptake of LARC could help to reduce unintended pregnancy.

We support the view that improving access to the full range of contraceptive methods and increasing nationally accredited training for all contraception providers is required.\(^8\) The potential benefits of LARC methods over CHC can actually be realised if this is applied as an audit standard for all clinicians involved in contraceptive care.

References


FACULTY AWARDS

The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare has available a number of annual awards for which applications are invited from Faculty members and non-members, as listed below. Details of the individual awards, together with an application form and/or guidelines on how to apply and any eligibility criteria, may be found on the Faculty website at www.fsrh.org.

Margaret Jackson Prize Essay

Award: Three prizes awarded annually for the best essays on a topic related to contraceptive and sexual health care. The first prize is £300, with £100 each for the two runners-up.

Eligibility: Individuals (undergraduate medical students)

Closing date: 24 March annually

The David Bromham Annual Memorial Award

Award: Prize awarded for a piece of work which through inspiration, innovation or energy has furthured the practice of sexual and reproductive health care in any way and any setting.

Eligibility: Individuals (Faculty members) or teams

Closing date: 7 April annually

International Travelling Scholarship of the Faculty

Award: Scholarship up to the value of £2000 to fund travel abroad to visit international colleagues, services, research or educational establishments to learn about some aspect of sexual or reproductive health care.

Eligibility: Individuals (Faculty members)

Closing date: 7 April annually

The 4-0-8 Sheffield Fund

Award: Approximately £1000 will be allocated every 3 months, either as a single award or divided between the successful applicants, for the purpose of funding training for health care professionals who have limited funding for attending training meetings.

Eligibility: Individuals (Faculty members/non-members)

Closing date: See website for details

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Reference

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