Influences on women’s choice of the levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system

We write to report a recent European survey of factors that motivate women to use or reject the levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system (LNG-IUS). The survey comprised focus group sessions to identify barriers that prevent women using the LNG-IUS and individual interviews with non-LNG-IUS users to identify their reasons for having chosen the LNG-IUS. A total of 297 women from France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain and Turkey were invited to take part in the survey. Two-hour discussion sessions based on a prepared list of topics identifying barriers to using the LNG-IUS were held with groups of six to eight randomly selected eligible volunteers aged 17–45 years (±18 years in Poland). Participants were currently using a form of contraception other than the LNG-IUS and were categorised as (1) nulliparous, but possibly desiring children in the future; (2) parous, planning more children in the future or uncertain; or (3) parous, with no plans for further children. Women who were not prepared to consider using hormonal contraception under any circumstances were excluded. Part Two of the survey comprised individual interviews with 72 current users of the LNG-IUS in France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain, using prepared questions to identify their opinions of, and reasons for choosing, this form of contraception. Participants were offered a small monetary incentive, in line with local guidelines.

Both the focus group sessions and the interviews were open-ended and explored participants’ current and past methods of contraception; reasons for their choices; sources of information, attitudes and knowledge regarding the LNG-IUS; and reasons for choosing or rejecting the LNG-IUS. Verbatim transcripts of the group sessions and interviews were analysed using accepted methodology1 and studied to identify key words and ideas, which were subsequently grouped into a series of themes.

In Part One of the survey, two focus group sessions in each country were conducted for each participant category. There were few differences between countries in terms of the most commonly used forms of contraception (oral contraceptives and condoms). The exception to this was Turkey, where the copper IUD predominates. Greater differences were seen between participant categories, reflecting the individual needs of each group. For example, although women became pregnant soon after the LNG-IUS removal was unimportant to those who had completed their families.

Factors influencing the potential use of the LNG-IUS that emerged from the focus group discussions are shown in Table 1. The prime concern of participants from Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain and Turkey was the cessation of menstruation, which is known to occur in approximately 20% of LNG-IUS users. These concerns were often found to be based on misinformation (from website chat rooms or friends) about the LNG-IUS, potentially leading to discontinuation. Inaccurate or misleading information from anecdotal sources is relied upon by many women whose concerns could be addressed with proactive counselling by their physicians. These findings are supported by the work of Asker et al. who analysed the concerns of women who had never used an IUD.2 Although the two populations in the present investigation were surveyed by different methods, their perceptions of the attributes of the LNG-IUS were broadly similar, with long duration of effect and low hormone content being viewed as important. A recent US-based Phase II study of the LNG-IUS in 509 women aged 18–45 years found that pre-counselling about possible side effects was associated with continued long-term use of the LNG-IUS.3 The present survey highlights the importance of soliciting the views of women and the factors that influence their decisions on contraceptive choice.

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Table 1 Advantages and disadvantages of the levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine (LNG-IUS) system identified by LNG-IUS non-contraceptive users focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived advantages of the LNG-IUS</th>
<th>Perceived disadvantages of the LNG-IUS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As effective as sterilization No need for user contraceptive education No risk of taking pills Lasts for 5 years Low hormonal dose Pregnancy possible immediately after removal Analgesia may be used during placement Targeted action Can be used when breastfeeding Not felt during use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of menstruation Several possible side effects Foreign body Possible pain with insertion and removal Possible damage with insertion and removal High cost No protection against sexually transmitted infections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IUD fitters and training in resuscitation

We are two clinical nurse specialists with experience of running a nurse-led intrauterine device (IUD) clinic since 2000 and with roughly 1000 insertions between us. None of our patients has ever needed atropine, despite us coping with some vasovagal attacks in the manner described by Diana Mansour.1 We feel that it is good counselling, friendliness and the almost universal use of local anaesthetic that helps to prevent the need for intervention of this sort. Ensuring that the woman has eaten before the procedure is also part of the preventative measures.

Please can we be given some real evidence as to why the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) persist in pursuing this policy of insisting a doctor is present? It is interesting from Shelley Michigan that both organisations seem to think they are taking the lead from the other.

Perhaps the question that needs to be looked at is the one of the use of atropine in this setting. Anecdotally it seems that clinicians working in this field have not needed to use atropine. We feel that this may be the idea to be discussed and clarification would be most welcome for clinicians and their service.

We work in a time of ‘evidence-based decisions’ and yet from all the correspondence that this has generated there is clearly none to justify this situation.

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IUD nurse fitters and resuscitation

I read with interest Shelley Mehigan’s reply to Diana Mansour’s letter in the July edition of the Faculty journal.1,2 This is certainly a major concern and like many areas we too have felt the need to suspend nurse led IUD (EJD) fittings until further guidance is available.

Obviously this has huge implications for patient access and loss of clinical skills for the nurses involved. I am hoping that by now neither the Faculty or the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) may be able to offer us further guidance? Just as Shelley Mehigan clearly states in her reply, I too am astounded that this sudden requirement should be justified for nurses alone. Surely this has implications for medical practitioners too.

I would be really grateful for any advice as to when guidance may be available, so that we can project when we may be able to resume normal services.

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References

1 Mehigan S. Nurse training and the need for IUD fitters to have expertise in resuscitation [Reply to Letter]. J Fam Plan Reprod Health Care 2010; 36: 180.

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