

**HEALTH
PROMOTION
AUDIT
PRECONCEPTUAL
CARE &
PREGNANCY**

Preconceptual care and pregnancy

Background

The pharmacist may be the first health care professional that a woman sees when she is trying not to be pregnant, trying to be pregnant or when she becomes pregnant. This provides many opportunities for health promotion interventions. Women who are likely to become pregnant usually enjoy good health but certain measures will increase the chances that she will continue to enjoy good health during her pregnancy and give birth to a healthy baby.

The government promotes the need for adequate intake of folic acid in the preconceptual period and in the first months of pregnancy.

Pharmacists have an important role to play in delivering this message because they see the target group as customers or patients and can provide information through leaflets and in other ways. Pharmacists may provide or sell pregnancy tests and may also provide ovulation kits and dispense drugs for IVF. You can stress the need for early visits to the GP and can also advise on health promotion measures such as smoking cessation, good diet, oral health and the need for visits to the dentist, avoidance of medicines in pregnancy, avoidance of alcohol, morning sickness, measures to avoid constipation, varicose veins and so on. Nutritional advice includes healthy eating before and during pregnancy, food hygiene, vitamin A avoidance as well as the need for adequate amounts of folic acid.

Pharmacists can fill the gap between family planning (contraception) and antenatal care.

Folic acid

In 1994 a report in the *British Medical Journal* revealed that over 80 per cent were not aware of the Department of Health recommendations and importance of folic acid.

Pharmacists need to be aware of:

- dietary sources of folic acid
- appropriate timing and dosages of folic acid supplements
- barriers which prevent women from taking folic acid supplements.

Information is available through the information departments of the NPA or the RPSGB or health promotion units.

Barriers which prevent women from taking folic acid supplements include:

- the concept of 'pregnancy planning' may be alien, so women may not prepare for conception
- cultural and religious difficulties
- socio-economic differences
- dietary supplements may be seen as a poor substitute for a good diet
- the fact that women are advised against taking any 'tablets' during pregnancy as these might harm the baby.

What can you do? Opportunities for health promotion

- Display leaflets about folic acid near **to** over-the-counter contraceptives, pregnancy tests and baby products
- Display posters in the pharmacy
- Ensure that pharmacy support staff are trained to give advice on folic acid supplements
- Provide window displays on folic acid supplements and other related preconceptual topics to catch the attention of passers-by
- Give leaflets about folic acid to women requesting pregnancy tests (even when the tests are negative) and purchasing ovulation tests
- Display folic acid supplements by these products - in this way making linked sales
- Talk to schools, women's groups and youth groups about folic acid advice and related matters
- Use opportunities for short articles in the local press or for speaking on local radio programmes.

Audit opportunities

Structure

- own knowledge and training
- support staff knowledge and training
- leaflets - stocks, quality and positioning in the pharmacy
- customers - identifying target group

Process

- opportunistic provision of information
- planned provision of information and advice

Outcome

- impact of pharmacist activities on local public awareness of folic acid.

Suggested activity

- 1 Over a predetermined period dependent on the size of your pharmacy, conduct a survey among customers to establish the numbers of people who are aware of the folic acid issue. This need not be restricted to women of childbearing years - remember that would-be fathers and grandmothers can usefully know about the need for folic acid. Record the data so that you have a baseline.
- 2 Think of what you are going to do to contribute to greater awareness. This may be an all embracing campaign with leaflets, posters, articles in the local press, talks to relevant groups, pro-active advice for women requesting pregnancy and ovulation tests, or it may be restricted to just one or two of these aspects. You may want to get together with other local pharmacies and others such as local public health directorate at the primary care organisation to conduct a larger local activity.
- 3 Conduct a second survey after an agreed time, depending on the nature of the activity to assess the impact of your activity.

Two audits on preconceptual care and pregnancy

1 Awareness of folic acid

Criterion

To increase the awareness of women of childbearing age about the importance of folic acid in preconceptual care and pregnancy.

Possible standards

- All women requesting pregnancy tests or ovulation kits to be given advice and information leaflets about folic acid.
- Stocks of leaflets will be maintained by
 - the OTC contraceptives and/or
 - the vitamin/food supplement section and/or
 - the feminine hygiene sectionfor one year
- Window displays will be provided / posters will be displayed during relevant national campaign weeks, such as Spina Bifida Week and National Condom Week to keep the message in the public eye.
- Folic acid supplements will be promoted and displayed in the pharmacy
- Folic acid awareness leaflets will be given out with prescriptions for the contraceptive pill so that women are aware before they plan their pregnancies.

Outcomes/benefits

- Increased public awareness about the need for folic acid
- Increased awareness amongst pharmacists and staff about the need for folic acid
- Increased awareness amongst other health professionals about the contribution made by community pharmacists
- Increased sales of folic acid and increased customer satisfaction
- Most importantly, hopefully, a reduction in the number of babies born with neural tubule defects.

Resource

Health Education Authority Folic Acid Campaign available from local health promotion units.

2: Pregnant mothers

Criterion

Women who are contemplating pregnancy or are in the early stages of pregnancy should be aware of the need for good antenatal care. Women who have an unwelcome pregnancy should be aware of the alternatives available and that early help should be sought.

Possible standards

1. All women purchasing pregnancy tests will be advised of the importance to make an early appointment with their GP (and her dentist) if the test is positive whether or not a positive outcome is desired.
2. The results of all pregnancy tests undertaken in the pharmacy will be recorded and given to the woman with an instruction to see her GP at an early date.
3. Advice about good health care such as safe use of medicines in pregnancy and breastfeeding, smoking cessation, folic acid, and good diet, oral hygiene, should be given to women seeking pregnancy tests and related products.