

# Patients' knowledge of the correct use of the oral contraceptive pill

## Aim

To assess knowledge and understanding of the use of oral contraception prescribed for those women attending nurse-led clinics in general practice for contraception advice or collecting a prescription for oral contraceptives from a community pharmacy.

Both sites could be involved at the same time; the women who have completed the questionnaire with the first professional would need to be excluded from the second sample and a record kept of their number.

## Introduction

The following views raise some of the key issues in this area:

*"As a highly trained professional in contact with members of the public in a non-medical setting, the pharmacist is in a prime position to provide accurate, factual information on contraceptive methods and services to members of the public."*<sup>1</sup>

*"One of the important roles as nurses is to empower women to take control of their own sexual health and well-being."*<sup>2</sup>

*The health of the nation set an objective "to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies" and a main target "to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies in the under 16s by at least 50% by the year 2000."*<sup>3</sup>

-The correct precautions that should be taken if a pill is missed/whilst taking antibiotics / or during an episode of diarrhoea or vomiting are not always followed<sup>4</sup>.

All original packs of the oral contraceptive pill contain a patient information leaflet that includes information about necessary precautions together with information regarding safe use: clear understanding of these precautions may enable many women to avoid

the trauma of an unwanted pregnancy. Some women, however, still experience pill failure and inadvertent pregnancies?. This would suggest that there is a need to improve the availability of information on the precautions necessary to ensure the effectiveness of oral contraception.

## Criteria and standards

### Criteria

All women prescribed the oral contraceptive pill should know what precautions should be taken if a pill is missed / if they are taking antibiotics / if they have diarrhoea or are vomiting.

### Standards

The actual % should be set by the individual practice.

## Data collection

### ■ by nurses

Women attending for contraceptive advice during a two-month period will be invited to complete the structured interview during their consultation.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the woman will receive information on the precautions necessary to ensure the correct use of oral contraceptives.

### ■ by pharmacists

Women presenting a prescription for either oral or barrier contraceptives from a community pharmacy during a one-month period will be invited to take part in the audit. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the woman will receive information on the precautions necessary to ensure the correct use of oral contraceptives.

## Sample form to be used for data collection

### Patients' knowledge of the correct use of oral contraception

Please tick appropriate boxes

Age:

under 16

16-18

19-25

26-35

36-45

Over 45

1 If you forgot to take your pill less than 12 hours ago:

a) Do you that day:

take it as soon as you remember?

use extra precautions (such as condoms)

for the next 7 days?

Other

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b) At the end of the pack, do you:

leave the usual 7 day break

before starting the next pack?

start the next pack on the next day

without a break?

2 If you forgot to take your pill more than 12 hours ago:

a) Do you that day:

take the most recently missed pill as soon as you remember?

discard any earlier missed pills?

use extra precautions (such as condoms)

for the next 7 days?

Other

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b) If the number of tablets left in the pack after the most recently delayed pill is:

i) more than 7 pills

At the end of the pack do you:

leave the usual 7 day break before starting the next pack?

start the next pack on the next day

without a break?

ii) less than 7 pills

At the end of the pack do you:

leave the usual 7 day break

before starting the next pack?

start the next pack on the next

day without a break?

3 If you have an upset tummy - either sickness or diarrhoea lasting:

a) less than 12 hours

As soon as you are better do you:

take an extra tablet from a spare pack and continue as normal?

use extra precautions (such as condoms) for the next 7 days?

Other

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b) more than 12 hours

As soon as you are better do you:

take an extra tablet from a spare pack and continue as normal?

use extra precautions (such as condoms) for the next 7 days?

Other

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4 If the tummy upset occurs when there are:

a) more than 7 pills left in the pack

At the end of the pack do you:

leave the usual 7 day break before starting the next pack?

start the next pack on the next day without a break?

b) less than 7 pills left in the pack

At the end of the pack do you:

leave the usual 7 day break before starting the next pack?

start the next pack on the next day without a break?

5 If antibiotics are to be taken at the same time as oral contraceptives do you:

use extra precautions (such as condoms)?

ask your doctor for advice?

ask your pharmacist for advice?

Other

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**There are no more questions. Thank you for your help.**

## Results

A record of the total number of women eligible to take part in the audit will be made.

Questionnaire results will be used to calculate the percentage of women who:

- know what action needs to be taken in the event of a missed pill whatever time in the cycle (questions 1 and 2)
- know what action needs to be taken in the event of an upset tummy - either sickness or diarrhoea whatever time in the cycle (questions 3 and 4)
- know what action needs to be taken in the event of antibiotics being taken at the same time as oral contraceptives (question 5)
- know what precautions should be taken if a pill is missed / if they are taking antibiotics / if they have diarrhoea or are vomiting (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

The data can be analysed to give the actual standard attained by each nurse or pharmacist and reported in relation to the collated results

**NB: Some information leaflets do not suggest that extra precautions are necessary for all antibiotics but that the woman should seek advice from her doctor.**

## Making the change

All women who complete the questionnaires will have the opportunity to be given any additional advice by the participating professionals.

The results should be discussed at a meeting held jointly with those nurses and pharmacists involved, together with local general practitioners.

Issues that may be covered during the meeting include:

- should women attending nurse-led clinics in general practice for contraception advice, or collecting a prescription for oral contraceptives or a barrier contraceptive from a community pharmacy be offered advice on what precautions should be taken if a "pill" is missed / if they are taking antibiotics / if they have diarrhoea or are vomiting on a regular basis?
- is the current distribution of health promotion leaflets effective?

- could other sites reach more women?

## When to re-audit

Set a date after which changes may be expected to be evident, for example, one year later.

## References

1. *Contraceptive handbook*, Family Planning Information Service, 1986; ix
2. *And then what happens?*, Burke, A, *Practice Nursing*, Nov 1992; 21
3. *The health of the nation*, Department of Health, HMSO, London, 1992
4. *Do combined oral contraceptives users know how to take their pill correctly?*, Brook S, *British Journal of Family Planning*, 1991; 17: 18-20
5. *Pill failure and non-use of secondary precautions*, Kakouris H, Kovacs G, *British Journal of Family Planning*, 1992; 18: 41-44