



March 11, 2010

Update from OCs OTC working group - March 2010

Dear colleague,

Below are several updates related to the Working Group on Oral Contraceptives Over-the-Counter, which we hope will be of interest to you. Please let us know if you have questions or comments about any of this information.

1. New research on concerns regarding contraceptive safety and interest in OTC access among Latinas in Texas (attached)
2. Articles exploring the risks and benefits of OTC access to OCs in SisterSong newsletter (attached)
3. NHeLP resources to advocate for Medicaid coverage for OTC contraceptives (attached)
4. Update on the London pilot project providing OCs in pharmacies
5. Request for input on working group website

1. New research on concerns regarding contraceptive safety and interest in OTC access among Latinas in Texas

Grossman D, Fernández L, Hopkins K, Amastae J, Potter JE. Perceptions of the safety of oral contraceptives among a predominantly Latina population in Texas. *Contraception*. March 2010; 81(3):254–260.

For this study, we aimed to examine women's perceptions about the safety of hormonal contraception, including how medically accurate their concerns were, and we also asked participants about their interest in obtaining OCs over the counter (OTC). Among 794 women potentially at risk of unintended pregnancy, 56.0% said that OCs were medically safe for them. Reasons given for OCs being unsafe were related to fears of side effects and prior negative experiences rather than true contraindications. Among nonusers or nonhormonal users and potential OC candidates (n=601), **60.2% said they would be more likely to use OCs if they were available OTC**. Results of the study show that women's perception of OC safety does not correlate well with medical eligibility for use. More education about the safety and health benefits of hormonal contraception is needed. OTC availability might contribute to more positive safety perceptions of OCs compared to a prescription environment.

2. Articles exploring the risks and benefits of OTC access to OCs in SisterSong newsletter
In the Fall 2009 issue of *CollectiveVoices*, published by SisterSong, Vanessa Cullins, Vice President for Medical Affairs at PPFPA, and Cherisse Scott, from Black Women for Reproductive Justice, have two excellent articles exploring the risks and benefits of OTC access to OCs. If you'd like to see the complete issue of *CollectiveVoices*, it is available at http://www.sistersong.net/publications_and_articles/CV_Fall_09/CV_FALL09_final_reduced_sz.pdf
3. NHeLP resources to advocate for Medicaid coverage for OTC contraceptives
The National Health Law Program (NHeLP) developed the attached factsheet highlighting the need for federal Medicaid coverage for OTC contraceptives such as EC, condoms and spermicides.



NHELP, together with Ibis, also submitted a draft policy entitled “Removing Barriers to Over-the-Counter Contraception for Low-Income Women” to be considered for adoption by the American Public Health Association at its annual meeting in November. If adopted, the policy will guide APHA’s national advocacy efforts. If you have comments on the policy, please email them to Dan, as we have until March 25 to submit comments (and then we’ll be working on revising the policy).

4. Update on the London pilot project providing OCs in pharmacies

The pilot project providing OCs without a prescription in several pharmacies in South London was launched at the end of last year and has been receiving some coverage in the press. As you may recall from previous updates, pharmacists were trained to provide counseling and assess women’s eligibility for OCs. Here is a link to more information:

http://www.southwarkpct.nhs.uk/our_services/sexual_and_reproductive_health/oral_contraception_pilot/

5. Request for input on working group website

We plan to launch the working group website in the coming months, and we would love suggestions about what information would be useful to you. Some ideas include:

- Working group statement of purpose
- Archived updates
- Relevant articles (if possible to post—otherwise “click to request”) and reports
- Relevant news
- Links to colleague organizations
- Map of countries where OCs are available OTC

If you have other ideas, please let us know.

Thanks so much,
Dan

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