



September 20, 2010

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About Us

The Oral Contraceptives (OCs) Over-the-Counter (OTC) Working Group is an informal coalition of reproductive health and rights organizations, nonprofit research and advocacy groups, university-based researchers, and prominent clinicians who share an interest in women's health and access to contraception. Our goal is to evaluate objectively the risks and benefits of demedicalizing contraceptive care, with an eye toward improving access to OCs and potentially other hormonal contraceptive methods by making them available without a prescription.

The working group is coordinated by Ibis Reproductive Health.

Dear Working Group member,

It is with great pleasure that we announce the launch of the working group's website: www.OCsOTC.org. The site has been in development for the past several months, and we appreciate the input that many of you have given on it. If you have ideas about other content for the site, please let me know.

The issue of moving OCs OTC has been in the news a great deal since the [New York Times op-ed by Kelly Blanchard](#) appeared in June. Below are links to several recent articles, including a [great piece by Kirsten Moore and Aimée Thorne-Thomsen](#) that appeared on RH Reality Check. There are also several relevant presentations at the upcoming Reproductive Health 2010 conference that we wanted to alert you to.

Thanks,
Dan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan", is positioned below the typed name.

Daniel Grossman
Senior Associate, Ibis Reproductive Health

Launch of OCs OTC Working Group Website: OCsOTC.org

The website includes the group's statement of purpose, brief descriptions of past working group meetings, an archive of past updates, and a detailed bibliography, including coverage in the press and in blogs, among other items. **If you or your organization would like to sign on to the statement of purpose and/or be listed among our partners, please let us know.**

We are especially excited to share with you a new resource that addresses [Frequently Asked Questions about OCs OTC](#). This will be a living document that will be added to as new evidence is generated. Currently we address the following questions:

- What are women's opinions about OTC or pharmacy access to OCs?
- Would women have enough information to know if OCs are safe for them to use?
- Would women know how to use OCs correctly and consistently if they did not get them from a health care provider?
- Would women miss out on other health benefits gained by an appointment with their health care provider to get a prescription?
- What is the likely impact of health care reform on an OTC switch?
- What about POPs? What do the data say about use, safety, and effectiveness?
- Would women's out-of-pocket expenses for OCs increase if they were to go OTC?
- What do providers think about OTC access to OCs?
- How could moving OCs OTC contribute to efforts to reduce unintended pregnancy?

Please let us know if you have comments about the FAQs, including additional questions that should be addressed.

OCs OTC in the News

The working group has been featured in several recent articles and blog postings, all of which can be accessed on the [website](#). Here are a few excerpts from these recent pieces:

Kirsten Moore and Aimée Thorne-Thomsen wrote on RH Reality Check: "For young women, an OTC option could be a game-changer. It would begin to close the gap in contraceptive access created by the stigma and shame associated with being sexually active. This stigma can prevent young women, and young women of color in particular, from seeking or continuing medical care with a doctor or other provider." [Read the full article](#).

The *Ottawa Citizen* editorial board wrote: "There is no good reason to force every woman who wants a refill of birth control pills to go to a doctor's office and get a prescription. Indeed, that women still have to do this, half a century after the Pill became available, shows how paternalistic the medical system still is when it comes to women's sexual choices." [Read the full article](#).

In an article in *The Tan Sheet*, an industry newsletter focused on OTC drugs, Dan Grossman was quoted as saying, "We are not necessarily interested in seeing an oral contraceptive

switched to OTC if it doesn't achieve this broader goal of really trying to improve access." [Read the full article.](#)

Presentations at Reproductive Health 2010

[The Reproductive Health 2010 Annual Clinical Meeting](#) will take place September 22-25 in Atlanta. Several sessions are relevant to the working group, including the following:

- Loretta Ross, the National Coordinator of SisterSong, will give opening remarks at the Welcome Reception on September 22 at 7:30 pm.
- Joe Potter will present an oral abstract entitled "Does convenience matter? Oral contraceptive continuation along the US-Mexico border" on September 23 at the 3:30 pm session. He will present the findings on continuation from the Border Contraceptive Access Study, which followed El Paso residents who obtained OCs in US family planning clinics or OTC in Mexican pharmacies.
- Kate O'Connell White will present an oral abstract entitled "The impact of pack supply on oral contraceptive continuation: A randomized controlled trial" on September 23 at the 3:30 pm session.
- Diana Foster has a poster entitled "Number of oral contraceptive pill packages dispensed and subsequent unintended pregnancies."
- Sally Rafie has a poster entitled "Provider opinions about expanding access to hormonal contraception."
- For Society of Family Planning members, Dan Grossman will give a brief presentation on the OCs OTC Working Group at the SFP business meeting on September 23 at 5 pm.

We also congratulate Carolyn Westhoff, the recipient of this year's Society of Family Planning Lifetime Achievement Award, which will be presented at the conference.