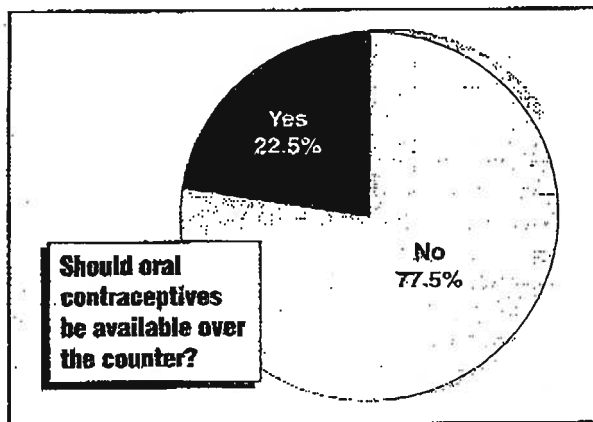


No over-the-counter OCs, say family planners

When it comes to making oral contraceptives (OCs) available over the counter, the majority of *Contraceptive Technology Update* readers stand firm in their opposition. More than 75% responding to the annual pill survey say OCs should remain prescription-only, a number slightly above the 72% of the past two years.



"We see a high-risk adolescent population," says Mary Anne Baker, CNM, a clinician at Health Quarters Reproductive Health Care Services in Beverly, MA. "Pap smears, chlamydia, and other STD screenings wouldn't get done without prescriptions."

There already is enough abuse and error in the use of oral contraceptives, says Steven Eisinger, MD, professor of family medicine and associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Rochester (NY)/Jacob W. Holler Family Medicine Center. "I wouldn't object to a short dose being available over the counter for emergency contraception," he says. "But for long-term use, I think it would greatly increase the risk of error and confusion, and the efficacy would go way down if OCs were available over the counter."

Not all readers, however, believe OCs should remain as prescription-only items. Randall Whitney, MD, medical director of Family Planning, a private practice in Daytona Beach, FL, says he favors making 20 mcg pills exempt from prescription. The low dose of estrogen makes those pills safe, even for smokers, he says.

For readers such as Shellie Johnson, BSN, RN, public health nursing supervisor, and Katrina Susi, BSN, RN, public health nurse III, both at the

Umatilla County Public Health Division in Pendleton, OR, the question bears further study.

"We believe in universal access to birth control," say the two clinicians in a written follow-up to their survey responses. "However, we have concerns about the need for empowerment of women through education necessary to understand how to use oral contraceptives effectively and how to negotiate all changes to accommodate for various side effects." ■

Readers share views on oral contraceptive use

When should patients begin their pill packs? When should new, non-breast-feeding mothers start combined oral contraceptives (OCs)? How about start times for nursing mothers when using progestin-only pills? Those are just some of the issues tackled by *Contraceptive Technology Update* readers in the 1998 pill survey. Following is an overview of how readers address the daily challenges of patient care.

CTU readers choose Sunday starts when it comes to initiating the first pack of pills. About 78% of those participating in the annual survey noted a preference for this practice. Sunday starts, which begin the pill pack on the first Sunday after the onset of menstrual bleeding, are easy to

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contraceptive Technology Update readers shared their views on a variety of issues surrounding oral contraceptives (OC) in their response to the 1998 annual pill survey. According to the results:

- Most providers prefer to use the "Sunday start" method when initiating OCs.
- Ortho Tri-Cyclen from Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceuticals of Raritan, NJ, was named as the top OC for women who previously have experienced nausea on birth control pills.
- Providers are divided when it comes to timing the start of birth control pills for new mothers, whether combined OCs for non-breast-feeding women or progestin-only formulations for nursing mothers.
- When presented with a female patient over age 35 who smokes at least 10 cigarettes a day, an overwhelming majority of CTU readers say they would not prescribe birth control pills.