

The Pill: An Essential Guide. Jo Johnson. Peterborough, UK: Need-2-Know, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-1-86144-058-7. Price: £8.99. Pages: 100 (paperback)

This book is aimed at the layperson who wants information about contraception. It focuses on 'pill' methods of contraception but has an overview of all methods, and there are chapters on religious and ethical issues and the law.

The chapters that focus on the combined pill and the emergency contraceptive pill are informative, and the 'Myths or Facts' section helps to answer many common questions. The chapter on the law gives clear information about consent and confidentiality issues. There is a good list of organisations and websites at the back of the book including Brook, Contraception Education, the FPA, R U Thinking and Teenage Health Freak.

However the language used is complex, and many long words are used, so it would take someone with good literacy to be able to read the book. The book is text only with no illustrations or cartoons, making it less appealing to a younger audience.

There are some factual errors, the most serious of which is the sentence saying condoms are less effective if used with non-oil-based lubricants. This could clearly cause confusion and even pregnancy. An IUCD is described as meaning intrauterine coil device and it is stated that the main body of the IUCD remains in the cervical canal. The implant's mode of action is said to be by thickening the mucus and thinning the lining of the womb – no mention is made of it stopping ovulation. There is inaccurate information on how to start the progestogen-only pill and it is stated that women will bleed every month with this method.

The first paragraph in the 'Religious and Ethical Issues' chapter lacks grammar and this chapter proceeds to declare that "it is a fact that modern British girls are more promiscuous than ever before". This is a judgmental statement that could alienate some readers, who are presumably picking up the book in order to help them be responsible about their own choices.

In conclusion, this book covers some useful topics but the inaccuracies suggest that other books may be more suitable. I'm sure that there are books out there that cover the subject matter in a more reader-friendly way.

Reviewed by **Emily Gwinnell**, MRCGP, DFRH
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Sexually Transmitted Infections: The Essential Guide. Nicolette Heaton-Harris. Peterborough, UK: Need-2-Know, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-1-86144-051-8. Price: £8.99. Pages: 100 (paperback)

This book sets out with the honourable intention of providing a clear guide to sexually transmitted infections and their treatment. Each chapter has a section on talking to teenagers. There is advice on how alcohol impacts on decision making, information on condom use, and a list of useful organisations and websites. The 'question and answer' format employed in the book is clear and easy to follow.

However, I have very serious reservations about this publication. First, it contains many factual inaccuracies, for example, errors in the

description of primary syphilis and advice that OTC products for warts can be used in the genital area. The author asserts that "AIDs is ultimately fatal", which is no longer the case. The author also recommends that woman treated for chlamydia have a test of cure as "not only will this put your mind at rest but it will also let you know if your partner received treatment." This is not necessarily true.

Other problems include information that, whilst accurate, is inappropriate for this publication. For example, the author expends three paragraphs on post-gonococcal urethral stricture and its management by urethrography and urethroplasty, which is alarmist, as is her discussion on the various histological types of penile cancer that could follow genital warts. She omits to mention that the HPV subtypes causing common external genital warts are not the oncogenic subtypes. Her general readers do not need to know how a Gram stain is performed in a GUM clinic. These problems may reflect the fact that the author has no medical training.

A second criticism is the use of language by the author. Her sentences can be long and repetitive but more alarming is her use of judgmental words such as "shockingly", "unfortunately" and "worryingly" when describing infections. The phrase "those of you who indulge in oral sex" is clearly condemnatory. She describes children being "contaminated" by HIV during pregnancy or birth. The overall tone implies that sex is fraught with danger. This extends to the cover photograph, which doesn't appear to be in keeping with the title of the book.

I would like Journal readers to be aware of this book as some of our patients may read it. We should consider redirecting them instead to the excellent *Speakeasy: Talking with Your Children About Growing Up* that was reviewed in the October 2009 issue of the Journal.

Reviewed by **Clare Payne**, FFSRH
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Cervical Cancer: The Essential Guide. Mary Lunnan. Peterborough, UK: Need-2-Know, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-1-86144-081-5. Price: £8.99. Pages: 104 (paperback)

As someone who has had their own brush with CIN3, I am always on the lookout for good books aimed at those who want to inform and empower themselves around the issue of smear tests, positive smear results and cervical cancer. So I am delighted at this new addition to a currently under-resourced field.

Three adjectives describe the book: compassionate, comprehensive, cancer-focused. Let's take these one by one.

Compassion shines through in every word of this work – unsurprisingly, for the author is Mary Lunnan, herself a cervical cancer survivor and someone who clearly knows the rollercoaster of reactions a diagnosis triggers. Thankfully, and unusually – even the current NHS call-back leaflets fail here – she addresses not only the factual but also the emotional issues, offering both reassurance and practical suggestions.

Comprehensive? Again, Lunnan scores a perfect ten. The book takes the reader from definition through prevention, screening, treatment and beyond, also including a helpful book list, referral list and glossary. Wide-ranging too is its market: the book is aimed at cancer sufferers; women who have had a positive smear; families, friends and partners; and also at parents

of teenage daughters (and the daughters themselves) who are considering vaccination. Comprehensive indeed.

Which brings us to my third adjective – and the only hesitation I have about the book. As the title of the book reflects – and the introduction, opening chapter and much of the succeeding text confirms – the book's focus is cervical cancer. But we know full well that patients need support way before a cancer diagnosis; the very thought of having a smear test, let alone receiving the results, can trigger even the most resourced woman into confusion, embarrassment and fear. The result is that many don't go for the test, or fail to respond to call-back. And I believe that this book misses a chance here.

I am not, of course, suggesting that the work should have missed even one word of its coverage of cervical cancer. But differently titled and slightly differently focused, it could have addressed the issues of those women not suffering from cancer – even those who have never had a positive smear – but who need information and encouragement in order to engage with the system and keep so engaged. It could have presented the whole process of "prevention – test – treatment" as a vital and reassuring component of regular female health care, rather than re-emphasising the worst, yet unlikely, outcome.

In short, I love this book. But I do hope that the fullest possible target market will not be misdirected by its cancer-focused title, and so fail to benefit from its superbly comprehensive and compassionate approach.

Reviewed by **Susan Quilliam**, BA, MNLPL
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The Pill and Other Forms of Hormonal Contraception (The Facts) (7th edn). John Guillebaud, Anne MacGregor. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0-19956-576-4. Price: £9.99. Pages: 200 (paperback)

This book, like others by the same author, is very easy to read and assimilate. It covers all the topics relevant to proper pill taking in an informative yet conversational style that clients will enjoy reading. Having said that, it makes pretty good reading for professionals too, and because it is in a 'question and answer' format the advice is much easier to remember.

The contents are divided into four parts. The first part deals with choosing the pill for contraception and all the reasons why it is one of the best methods available. The second part deals with safety issues to consider before and after commencing pill taking. The third part deals with actual pill taking and common questions or difficulties that clients have when taking it. The final section introduces the reader to progestogen-only pills, emergency hormonal contraception and the male pill.

This book is well written, concise and very useful for clients. Apart from a few typographical errors, the content is up to date and easy to understand. It would be useful in a clinic library where it could be used to explain pill-related problems and solutions to clients in the 'question and answer' format that the author uses.

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