Effective copper surface area of IUDs

Many providers of intrauterine devices (IUDs) wrongly believe that the nominal surface area of copper IUDs equals the effective copper surface area. The reality is different, however. This letter explains the situation.

Studies suggest that a good contraceptive efficacy is obtained with IUDs having a copper surface area of 200 mm². Failure rates of the T-Safe® TCu200 are of the order of 3.0 at 2 years. When the copper surface area is increased to 380 mm², failure rates are usually less than 1.5 at 5 years. No additional reduction in failure rate is seen when the copper surface area is increased further.

These clinical studies were conducted with copper IUDs provided with a copper wire wound around the stem of the IUD. It is important to distinguish between IUDs with copper wire and the ones that have copper sleeves or a combination of the two. The remark by Kosonen is important: “Only in the case of sleeves is the effective surface area”.1 Other researchers confirm these findings: “The smaller the size of the GyneFix the less the effect on menstrual blood loss. Women wearing the small GyneFix 200 IUD report a similar bleeding pattern when compared with the bleeding pattern before insertion of the IUD”.2 At the same time, the small surface area optimises tolerance. This could be important since abnormal bleeding and pain are the two major reasons for IUD discontinuation.

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Inappropriate advertising?

I was shocked to see the Emotional Bliss advertisement in the last issue of the Journal (J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care 2005; 31: 301). I do not feel that such advertisements conform to the ethical medical standards of a scientific journal. I fully understand that commercials are essential to finance the publication of a journal but advertisements of sex toys are totally out of character of a scientific journal.

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Reply

I was sorry to hear that Dr Qureshi objected to this advertisement. Many of the readers of this journal are necessarily involved in psychosexual therapy as part of their professional activities. In 2004, the journal published a special supplement about parenthood, emotional well-being and sexuality in which an advertisement for the firm Emotional Bliss appeared and was welcomed by the readership. Our readers are mainly concerned with contraception and reproductive health and, because of this, they treat more women than men. The commonest sexual problem in women is loss or lack of libido. Whatever a therapist’s personal feelings about the use of sexual aids, it has been shown that they are a useful adjunct to treatment for sexual responsiveness in many women. The Journal’s Editorial Board believes that enabling doctors and therapists to recommend a safe and discrete source for sexual aids assists the women that they are treating.

Anne Szarewski, PhD, FFPI
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care (on behalf of the Editorial Board)