BOOK REVIEWS


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 contraceptive methods in 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 on 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 "only 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 an 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.

Other problems include information that, whilst accurate, is inappropriate for this publication. For example, the author expends three paragraphs on how to locoalisable uterine leiomyomata and their structure and its management by urography and urethroplasty, which is alarmist, as is her discussion on the various histological types of pelvic cancer and the effect this has on cervical cancer. 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 that 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 and their effects. 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 there is much to fear and 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, FSRH Associate Specialist in Reproductive Health Care, North Devon, UK


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 screening 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 Lunnun, 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 for abnormal 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 callback. 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 missed by what I call this incredible and so far to benefit from its superbly comprehensive and compassionate approach.

Reviewed by Susan Quilliam, BA, MNLP Freelance Writer, Broadcaster and Agony Aunt, Cambridge, UK


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 is pretty good reading for professionals too, and because it is in a ‘question and answer’ format the advice is much easier to remember.

The book is 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 and GPs alike. Apart from the 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.

Reviewed by Neelima Deshpande, MBChB, MFSSH, St John’s College Doctor, The JRFH, University Hospital, Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust, Birmingham, UK