
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 the other methods. The book includes 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 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, RU 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 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 progesterogen-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 implying that sex is fraught with danger. This is a judgmental statement.

She describes children being “contaminated” by HIV during pregnancy or birth. The overall tone implies that having sex is dangerous. 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 about the issue of smear tests, positive smears and cervical cancer. So I was 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 Lunnen, 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 from our local GUM clinic. These problems may reflect the fact that the author has no medical training.

The book is well written, concise and very useful for cliniﬁcal use. A clipping for the ‘question and answer’ format the advice is presented in makes this book 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 organized 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 the progesterogen-only pills, emergency hormonal contraception and the male pill.

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Reviewed by Neelima Deshpande, MBCCGP, MFSRH, Staff Grade Doctor in Primary Care, Primary Care Trust, Birmingham, UK


This book sets out with the honourable intention of providing 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 and a list of useful organisations and websites. The ‘question and answer’ format employed in the book is clear and easy to follow.

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 people with genital herpes should be treated for clamhymia 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 spends three paragraphs describing generalised lymphadenopathy and its treatment and then 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.

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 misguided by the title and story because it is far from benefiting from its superbly comprehensive and compassionate approach.

Reviewed by Susan Quilliam, BA. MNL.P Freelance Writer, Broadcaster and Agony Aunt, Cambridge, UK


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