Contraceptive failure and the progestogen-only pill

The case report by Chandler and Nash in this issue of the Journal is interesting and highlights the need for trials of hormonal contraceptive use to include obese women.

The authors acknowledge that despite an apparent association between contraceptive failure and higher body weight in studies of a Norplant® prototype and a levonorgestrel-releasing vaginal ring, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate reduced efficacy in heavier women using the progestogen-only pill (POP). Current guidance from the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) advises one progestogen-only pill (POP) per day irrespective of body weight. This recommendation is based on the evidence available at the time of publication and the consensus of the guideline development group.

The recent review of obesity and oral contraceptive pill (OCP) failure lends further support to FSRH guidance. The authors conclude that they “found no convincing evidence that very heavy or obese women have a higher risk of oral contraceptive pill failure” and there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate reduced efficacy in heavier women using the progestogen-only pill (combined and progestogen-only) failure during perfect use than thinner women, even with the lowest doses formulations”. Trussell and colleagues mention the difficulties of reliably measuring adherence and they speculate that OCs may be less forgiving to imperfect use among heavier women.

Given that long-acting reversible methods of contraception (LARC) are known to be highly effective and less dependent on adherence than OCs, LARC methods should be offered to all women, particularly following OCP failure.

Louise Melvin, MRCCG, MFSRH
Director, FSRH Clinical Effectiveness Unit, and Consultant in Sexual and Reproductive Health, Sandysford, Glasgow, UK.
E-mail: louise.melvin@nhs.net

Lost IUD penetrating bladder wall

The incidence of uterine perforation following intrauterine device (IUD) insertion is reported to be between 0.05 and 0.1000 insertions.1 Misplaced IUDs can be diagnosed simply with speculum examination. Missing threads is the usual sign and may be due to unrecognised expulsion, enlarged uterus due to pregnancy, the IUD threads becoming embedded or whether the IUD moved through the uterine wall. This case also emphasises the need for regular check-ups following IUD insertion and the need to be suspicious of possible locations other than the uterus. Most importantly, an accurate diagnosis may facilitate the use of endoscopic techniques and result in minimally invasive treatment.

Mehmet Vural, MD
Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Harran University, Sanliurfa, Turkey
E-mail: drmvural@yahoo.com

Hakan Camuzcuoglu, MD
Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Harran University, Sanliurfa, Turkey

Burak Segin, MD
Doctor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Harran University, Sanliurfa, Turkey

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Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Harran University, Sanliurfa, Turkey

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