Contraceptive failure and the progestogen-only pill

The case report by Chandler and Nashi 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) use 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 [combined and progestogen-only] failure during perfect use than thinner women, even with the lowest doses formulations”. Trussell and colleagues mention the difficulty in calculating adherence and they speculate that OCs may be less forgiving of 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.

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References

Lost IUD penetrating bladder wall

The incidence of uterine perforation following intrauterine device (IUD) insertion is reported to be around 0.01% (1 in 1000 insertions). Misplaced IUDs can be diagnosed simply with speculum examination. Missing threads is the usual sign and may be due to unforeseen expulsion, enlarged uterus due to pregnancy, the IUD threads becoming detached or, most importantly, perforation. A 48-year-old woman was admitted to our clinic with a suspected misplaced IUD. She had her IUD inserted 15 years ago in a health cabin by a midwife. She started having pelvic pain following insertion; however, this was attributed to complications, mechanism, incidence, and missing string. Obstet Gynecol Surv 1981; 36: 335–355.

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