A survey of teenagers’ attitudes toward moving oral contraceptives over the counter

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Disclosures

• Ruth Manski has no relevant financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose

• Melissa Kottke is a Nexplanon trainer for Merck and receives a consulting fee

• Study supported by a grant from the Society of Family Planning Research Fund

Introduction

• Teenagers experience high rates of unintended pregnancy and face challenges accessing contraception

• Evidence suggests over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives may reduce unintended pregnancy and increase contraceptive access

• Limited research on teenagers and over-the-counter access
Study Aims

To explore female teenagers’:

1. Attitudes toward oral contraceptives being available for teenagers through over-the-counter access; and
2. Understanding of a prototype over-the-counter product label

Methods

• Recruitment: Facebook advertisements
• Eligibility: Female, age 14-17, fluent in English
• Measures:
  • Demographic and reproductive characteristics
  • Support and likelihood of over-the-counter use
  • Advantages and disadvantages
  • Willingness and ability to pay
  • Label comprehension
• Analysis: Descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses in SPSS

Results: Participant Characteristics

Demographics:
• 348 participants
  • 32% age 17; 31% age 16; 24% age 15; 13% age 14
  • 67% non-Hispanic White
  • 53% suburban
  • 95% insured

Reproductive characteristics:
• 44% sexually active
  • 60% had unprotected sex
  • 90% used contraception
  • 58% used oral contraceptives
  • 12% been pregnant
Results: Over-the-Counter Access

Support:
• 73% in favor of over-the-counter access
• Participants who had sex more likely to support over-the-counter access (85% vs. 63%, p<.001)
• Participants who had never been tested for STIs more likely to support over-the-counter access (91% vs. 76%, p<.05)

Interest:
• 61% likely to use over-the-counter access
• Participants who had sex more likely to use over-the-counter access (77% vs. 48%, p<.001)

Results: Over-the-Counter Access

Advantages:
• Fewer teens would get pregnant (45%)
• Easier for teens to get birth control (22%)
• It would be more confidential (14%)

Disadvantages:
• Teens might not use condoms to protect against STIs (22%)
• Teens need a doctor to determine if pills are safe (19%)
• Teens might have sex at a younger age (18%)
• Teens might use pills incorrectly (16%)

Results: Label Comprehension

• Participants understood an average of 7.1 of 8 key concepts
• No statistically significant differences among subgroups
Percentage of participants that understand key concepts about product label

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concept</th>
<th>Total (N=348)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. POPs do not prevent STIs or HIV</td>
<td>94.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. POPs should not be used by individuals with allergy to any ingredient in the product</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Side effects of POPs include irregular periods</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Condoms should be used for at least the first two days after starting POPs</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. POPs should be taken at the same time each day</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use condoms or abstain from sex for 2 days if POP is taken ≥ 3 hours late</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Users should contact a doctor immediately if they experience abdominal pain</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Take another pill immediately if vomiting occurs within 2 hours of taking POPs</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results: Over-the-Counter Access

Price willing and able to pay per month's supply of over-the-counter oral contraceptives (n=212)

Conclusions

- Participants support and would use oral contraceptives over the counter
- Participants understand how to effectively use oral contraceptives with independent label review
- Perceptions of benefits highlight potential of over-the-counter access to increase contraceptive access and reduce unintended pregnancy
- Cost of over-the-counter product may impact teens’ use
Limitations

• Non-generalizable
• Selection bias
• Hypothetical questions about over-the-counter use
• Need for more extensive analyses

Acknowledgments

• Melissa Kottke and the Jane Fonda Center for Adolescent Reproductive Health
• Society of Family Planning Research Fund
• Roger Rochat and Rollins School of Public Health
• Dan Grossman and the Over the Counter Oral Contraceptives Working Group
• The North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology