Materials, methods and results of the Norplant training program

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Abstract

Norplant subdermal implants for contraception were introduced into UK clinical practice in October 1993. Use of Norplant requires providers to learn additional skills. A training program designed to give providers the opportunity to obtain these skills was designed and implemented through the co-operation of Hoechst Roussel, JHPIEGO and members of the UK medical profession.

Uptake of training for Norplant provision has been widespread and Norplant has been established as a realistic contraceptive choice for women in the UK. Introduction of Norplant in the UK has raised many issues that go beyond clinical considerations.

Introduction

Norplant is a long-term method of contraception consisting of six flexible capsules containing levonorgestrel designed for subdermal placement. Once in place, the capsules release levonorgestrel and are effective in the prevention of pregnancy for 5 years [1].

Norplant was introduced into UK clinical practice in October 1993. Traditionally, the UK is seen to offer a good standard of provision of contraceptive care. The majority of contraceptive care is provided through general practice (primary care) and this is supported in many areas by a specialist family planning service. It is recognized that the specialist services help serve certain parts of the population who perhaps find that it is inconvenient or undesirable to seek family planning services from the local family practitioner. Although UK contraceptive care is generally
considered to be of high quality, usage of Norplant does require the provider learn additional skills which are as yet not incorporated into the professional training curricula for health care providers. It was recognized prior to the program for Norplant in the UK that successful use of Norplant depends upon the skill of the service provider. The skills include counselling skills, the minor surgery skills needed for insertion and removal, and skills related to user support and management during use of the method.

A summary of the approach taken to ensure that Norplant could be used successfully and appropriately within a UK setting is given in this review along with a discussion of the influences the introduction of this method has had on provision of contraceptive services in the UK.

**Materials, methods and approach**

The training program for the introduction of Norplant into the UK was developed through the collaboration of Hoechst Roussel Ltd., the Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Reproductive Health Care (JHPIEGO) and representatives of the medical profession in the UK. The contents of the program were based on a format which had been utilized by JHPIEGO in their introductory programs for Norplant in a number of countries throughout the world. The structure and content of the program is standardized and uses a humanistic approach [2] to training, and lends itself to duplication without reduction in quality, providing all stages are completed according to recommendations.

The objective of the training program is to equip the trainee with the following skills:

1. Knowledge and understanding of Norplant as a method of contraception. Details of the physical properties, mode of action, pharmacokinetics, efficacy and tolerability of the method are required along with an understanding of the benefits and limitations of the method and the type of women who would be suitable candidates to use Norplant successfully.

2. Specific counselling skills for Norplant, including which features of the method need to be discussed with the potential client to ensure an informed choice can be made.

3. Insertion skills. Norplant requires placement in the subdermal plane. Correct insertion will allow for simple removal; incorrect insertion can lead to difficulties in removal.

4. Further counselling skills to support the client during her use of Norplant.

5. Removal skills. Initially, one technique for removal of Norplant (standard technique) was taught, however recently, a second technique (the ‘U’ technique [3]) has also been introduced.