

Screening Unneeded in Some Older Women?

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT
San Francisco Bureau

VANCOUVER, B.C. — Women over age 50 with normal Pap results who don't have human papillomavirus probably can safely be excused from cervical screening, Marc F.D. Baay, Ph.D., said in a poster presentation at the 22nd International Papillomavirus Conference.

That would encompass 93% of women older than 50 years, said Dr. Baay of the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Dr. Baay and his associates followed 513 women in three age groups for a median of 3 years with 1,952 Pap smears and testing for high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) types. Results showed 41 transient infections and 9 persistent HPV infections, with only 2 of the persistent

infections in women aged 50 and up, they reported at the conference, sponsored by the University of California, San Francisco.

HPV infection in 16% of 68 women aged younger than 30 years was transient in every case. HPV infection in 14% of 175 women aged 30-49 years and 6% of 270 women aged 50 years and older was persistent in 4% of women in the middle-age group and less than 1% of the women over age 50. Five out of the nine persistent

infections were related to HPV 16. All women had normal cytology results at the time HPV was first detected.

Six of the nine women with persistent infections developed abnormal cytology during the follow-up study. Only one of these women was over age 50; she developed high-grade squamous intraepithelial lesions (HSIL) at age 52. A biopsy showed cervical intraepithelial neoplasia grade 0 (CIN0).

Canceling cervical screening for HPV-negative older women with normal Pap results would carry a limited risk of missing abnormalities.

The other five abnormal Pap results in women with persistent HPV came from women aged 30-49 years. A biopsy in one woman with HSIL found CIN3. Among three cases of low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesions (LSIL), one regressed spontaneously, and a biopsy in another found cervical intraepithelial neoplasia grade 3 (CIN3). One woman with persistent HPV in this middle-age group developed atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance (ASCUS).

Low-grade abnormal cytology also was seen in 10 HPV-negative women (7 with ASCUS and 3 with LSIL), but these lesions all regressed spontaneously.

The study suggests that canceling cervical screening for HPV-negative older women with normal Pap results would carry only a limited risk of missing cervical abnormalities or the development of slow-growing cervical cancer, Dr. Baay said. ■

OCs Could Lessen Premenstrual Worsening of Depression: Study

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
Senior Writer

ATLANTA — The use of oral contraceptives appears to decrease the premenstrual worsening of depressive symptoms, Hadine Joffe, M.D., said at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

In preliminary research, the use of augmentation with oral contraceptive pills was evaluated in women who already take antidepressants but experience worsening symptoms during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle, said Dr. Joffe, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston.

The 17 women who completed the study reduced their depression scores during the premenstrual phase on the Daily Record of Severity of Problems Scale from a median score of 58 to a median score of 35.3. In addition, their Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale scores improved from a median of 20 to a median of 4.

A total of 26 women, aged 18-45 years, were randomized to a double-blind treatment with an oral contraceptive contain-

ing drospirenone and ethinyl estradiol (Yasmin). One group received additional ethinyl estradiol on days 22-28, which is the typical placebo week of the oral contraceptive pills.

To be eligible for the 2-month study, women had to have regular 25- to 35-day menstrual cycles, a depressive disorder, and stable use of an antidepressant for 2 months or more. In addition, all participants completed a run-in tracking month before starting the oral contraceptive pill. Depressive symptoms were found to be present only during the premenstrual phase.

Of the women included in the study, 82% had major depression, 12% had minor depression, and 6% had dysthymia.

The oral contraceptive pills were well tolerated, and there appeared to be no difference between women who received the additional ethinyl estradiol during days 22-28 of their cycles and those who received placebo during that time.

The study was sponsored by the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression, and product support was provided by Berlex, which manufactures Yasmin. ■

Educate About Douching to Discourage Intergenerational Transfer of Invalid Information

BY SHARON WORCESTER
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NEW ORLEANS — Despite the growing consensus that douching can threaten gynecologic health, the practice is not widely discouraged by health care providers, results of a small survey suggest.

Furthermore, 73% of the 57 women surveyed (all douched or had practiced douching at some point) said they had encouraged or would encourage the girl or girls they were parenting to douche, Richard Rupp, M.D., reported in a poster that was presented during the annual meeting of the North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology.

The women, who were recruited from a university-based teen clinic, were the mothers, grandmothers, or aunts of girls aged 11-21 years. The women ranged in age from 30 to 68 years (mean age 41 years).

More than half (53%) were African American, 28% were non-Hispanic white, 17% were Hispanic, and 2% were of other ethnicities, reported Dr. Rupp of the University of Texas, Galveston.

The women were questioned about their personal douching history, beliefs about douching, and any discussions they had or planned to have with the girls regarding the practice. Douching frequency was once every 2 months or less in 20% of respondents, once or twice each month in 66% of respondents, and at least once each week in 14% of respondents.

All except one of the 57 women had

discussed or planned to discuss douching with the girl or girls they were parenting.

Only 10 of the surveyed women said a health care professional had ever discussed douching with them or the girls, and only 5 said they felt the health care professional discouraged the practice.

More than 40% of the respondents had not discussed—and had no plans for discussing—any negative aspects of douching with the girls.

The most common statements that the women made or planned to make were that douching:

- ▶ Helps with cleanliness/feminine hygiene (89% of respondents).
- ▶ Treats vaginal odor (43% of respondents).

- ▶ Can cause vaginal irritation (36% of respondents).

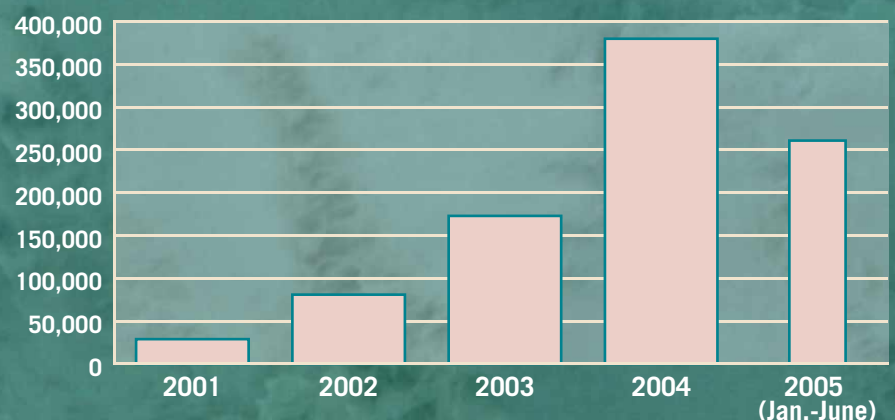
- ▶ May cause vaginal infections (30%).
- ▶ Is not reliable for birth control (27%).
- ▶ Is unnecessary (24%).

The mean age of girls with whom they already discussed douching was 16 years, and the mean age of the girls with whom they had not discussed douching was 14 years, Dr. Rupp noted in the poster.

The findings of this study show that adult women are an important source of information about douching for the girls they parent, and suggest that health care professionals should address the matter of douching with adult patients as their girls enter the 14- to 16-year age group, he concluded, noting that public campaigns designed to decrease douching should target the matter of intergenerational information exchange. ■

DATA WATCH

Big Jump in Plan B Emergency Contraception Prescriptions



Note: Projected from more than 2 billion pharmacy, hospital, and dispensed prescriptions in the United States.
Source: Verispan