

Researcher launches teen contraceptive website

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Friends, the mainstream media and the internet, all potentially unreliable sources, continue to be the way America's young adults find their health information. Research has found that while they trust health professionals and health educators, they often do not turn to them for information, especially when it comes to their sexual health.

In an attempt to provide a reliable and trustworthy source for [reproductive health](#) information for [teenagers](#), one physician-researcher at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island has launched the website Ask A Doc RI.

"My thought was to bring the information to where the teenagers are, which is on the internet," says Vinita Goyal, MD, MPH, of Women & Infants' Center for Women's Primary Care. "Ask A Doc RI contains a variety of information on contraception and local clinical resources where youth can seek [health](#) care."

In addition, the website, which includes links to Healthy Kids Rhode Island and Women & Infants, fields anonymous questions on [sexual health](#) from teenagers. The questions are answered by one of five participating Women & Infants physicians, and the answers are posted online within 72 hours.

"Our outreach will target teenagers living in Rhode Island communities with high teen pregnancy rates – Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket – to get this important information to them," Dr. Goyal

explains, noting that information will be available in community health centers and through Healthy Kids Rhode Island coalition members working with underserved youth.

Ask A Doc RI will also serve as a research project for Dr. Goyal, who is Women & Infants' current Women's Reproductive Health Research scholar, a program sponsored by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development to protect research time for young doctors. There are limited studies specifically addressing the effectiveness of contraceptive education through the internet in promoting healthy behaviors. Confidential surveys will be given to teenagers asking questions on the site and the information will be collected as part of the research.

"Success of the project will be measured by the number of contraceptive queries obtained through the website," Dr. Goyal notes. "While it will be difficult to ascertain if contraceptive behavior is improved, it is expected that if the website serves as a useful educational tool for [young women](#) in Rhode Island, the number of queries posted will increase over time."

In addition to fielding questions on Ask A Doc RI, there are sections on the website containing general information on all available contraceptive options and frequently asked questions about contraception, as well as contact information on local health centers for teens interested in making an appointment or meeting face to face with a provider.

Unique to Ask A Doc RI will be a section with current contraceptive issues brought up by local and national media. Complete information will be supplied so teenagers can make the best decision for their sexual health.

"Many young women discontinue contraception over concerns about safety. Incomplete news reports about intrauterine devices, litigious

commercials regarding the association of blood clots and oral contraceptive pill use, and other similar events have resulted in young women discontinuing effective methods of contraception without seeking alternative methods to prevent unplanned pregnancy," Dr. Goyal says.

Ask A Doc is sponsored by a grant from the Lalor Foundation, an organization that seeks to educate young women about human reproduction in order to broaden and enhance their options in life.

More information: www.askadocri.com/

Provided by Women & Infants Hospital

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