

Consider IUDs for contraception, other conditions

April 13 2012, By Angela Koenig

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati (UC) have found that intrauterine devices (IUDs) containing progesterone are a safe and effective means of birth control and support its use as a treatment option for medical conditions like pelvic pain, abnormal bleeding, and to prevent uterine cancer.

“IUDs are good contraceptive methods with many other advantages,” says Michael Thomas, MD, a UC Health reproductive endocrinologist and infertility specialist who leads studies in contraceptive research.

A faculty member at the UC College of Medicine and co-founder of the UC Center for Reproductive Health, Thomas has been the principal investigator on more than 100 clinical trials with many involving different IUDs.

The IUD is a small medical device vaginally inserted into the uterus. It works by preventing sperm from reaching the fallopian tubes by thickening the mucus around the cervix (mouth of the womb) and by acting as a barrier if the sperm enters the uterus.

“Modern IUDs are entirely different from those of 20 years ago,” Thomas explains, referring to a drop off in IUD use during the 1970s when fear arose from an inaccurate correlation made between IUDs and infection.

Today’s IUDs, he says, are smaller and manufactured entirely differently

from former devices; and while physicians once only recommended their use for women who were finished having children, the IUD now has advantages for women of varying ages and stages in their reproductive years.

Thomas says that use of IUDs is gaining in popularity nationwide.

“This is because the device has multiple purposes: it leads the way in contraceptive effectiveness with pregnancy rates less than 1 percent compared to 2 to 8 percent noted by [birth control](#) pill users,” Thomas says.

And, according to Thomas, studies also show that IUD users have a decreased risk of uterine [cancer](#), one of the most common female gynecologic cancers.

Currently there are two types of IUDs approved for use in the United States, one that contains copper and one that contains the hormone levonorgestrel. While both have their benefits, Thomas says, new and current IUD research studies are expected to provide women a cost-effective option for IUD treatment.

“Currently, the IUD with insertion can cost over \$1,000,” says Thomas.

More information: For more information on the use of IUDs, visit the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists website at www.acog.org/ and search IUD.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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