

Improving access to contraceptive care through nurse prescribing

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Over the past decade it has been increasingly appreciated that specialist nurses in the UK are able to make effective decisions concerning the right choice of contraceptive agent for a given patient. Specialist preparation both in terms of formal education and practical experience has produced a significant number of nurses well able to manage the major part of a woman's needs so far as contraceptive care is concerned. This is recognised not only by nurses, but also, by medical colleagues and most importantly - patients.

Quite often, the experience of seeking assistance with contraceptive needs, can be daunting. Any innovation, which allows the patient to receive a comprehensive package of care from one person has to be welcomed - nurse prescribing offers this possibility.

The problem to date in the UK has been that although the ability of the specialist nurse to determine appropriate contraception is widely recognised, the legal ability for a nurse to prescribe or supply the products needed has not. Fortunately plans are in place to change this situation. In addition to the legal right to supply products using patient group directions from 2002 nurses working in contraceptive health practice will be able to prescribe a wide range of oral contraceptive and other agents.

This presentation will consider the developments in nurse prescribing in the UK both historically and with a view to the future. We will examine this from a national policy perspective and then move to consider the implications for nurses and patients in the practice setting.