

Oral contraceptives and compliance among Norwegian adolescents

G. Garmo, T. Øvreneess, F.E. Skjeldestad

Section of Epidemiological Research, Unimed SINTEF, Trondheim, Norway

Objective: To study compliance and consequences of low compliance when using oral contraceptives (OCs) in a cohort of Norwegian adolescents

Methods: From August 31, 1998 to December 31, 1999 1152 teenagers (mean age 18,1; range 16-24) were recruited to a study evaluating how public health nurses and midwives performed as OC-prescribers. The study was run as a clinical trial with scheduled visits at 3-6 months interval. Compliance was measured along three outcomes: continuation rates, forgotten pills and starting a new cycle on a wrong day. All analyses were done in SPSS using survival analyses and logistic regression.

Results: During the first year of use 428 of 1152 (37%) teenagers, who received a prescription of OC, discontinued use. The probability on continued use through month 3, 6 and 11 were 0,81, 0,73 and 0,59, respectively. The cumulative probability of forgetting at least one pill during one cycle over the first six study months were 0,45, and 0,13 for forgetting two or more pills, respectively. The cumulative probability of starting at least one cycle on a wrong day over the first six months was 0.07. Six pregnancies were diagnosed over the first 11 months, which translates into a cumulative probability of OC failure (overall) to 0.01. Among background factors such as previous OC use, sexual activity, smoking and BMI, low BMI (<20 kg/m²) were a significant predictor of forgetting pills (at least one) and starting a new cycle on a wrong day. The study had no power to pursue consequences of "low" compliance.

Conclusion: Compared with results published from international studies we may consider the continuation rate of OC use as high and the phenomenon of forgetting pills/starting on a new cycle on a wrong day as relatively low among Norwegian adolescents.