

Young women's perceptions and experiences with contraception supply in community pharmacies

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Abstract

Background: Unintended pregnancy is a major public health problem in the United States. Correct contraceptive use can reduce the rate of unintended pregnancy. Community pharmacies are well positioned to provide contraceptives and advice about contraception.

Objectives: To determine young women's perceptions and experiences with contraception supply in community pharmacies and to identify whether pharmacy characteristics predicted very positive experiences.

Design: This study comprised two cross-sectional surveys including an online women's pharmacy perceptions and experiences (PPE) survey and a faxed/observed survey of community pharmacies.

Setting: One county in Michigan

Participants: Young women and community pharmacies

Main outcome measure: The two surveys were merged to explore pharmacy characteristics that may impact women's perceptions and experiences with community pharmacies. Multiple logistic regression analysis was used to explore relationships between pharmacy characteristics and positive outcomes.

Results: The response rate for the PPE survey was 54% ($n = 343/637$). Data from all community pharmacies in the county was retrieved via fax ($n = 41/94$, 43.6%) or observation ($n = 53/94$, 56.4%). Women were included in this analysis if they indicated a regular pharmacy (one they go to most often) in the county of interest ($n = 210$). More than 50% of women ($n = 125/210$) visited a pharmacy more than once per month. Sixty percent of women were currently using something to prevent pregnancy ($n = 124/210$, 60.8%). Thirty-five percent of women had a positive experience ($n = 73/210$, 34.8%). In the multiple logistic regression, women who visited a chain pharmacy had almost 65% lower odds of an overall positive experience with their regular pharmacy compared with women who visited a grocery or mass merchandise pharmacy (odds ratio 0.35 [95% CI 0.16], $P = 0.75$).

Conclusion: Young women visit community pharmacies and use contraceptives frequently. Interventions need to be developed and implemented to improve young women's perceptions and experiences with contraception at community pharmacies.

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Unintended pregnancy is a major public health problem in the United States, with more than 3 million unintended pregnancies reported annually.¹ In 2008, 51% of all pregnancies in the United States were unintended.² This rate is consistently higher than the global rate of 41% and that of many other developed countries.³ Unintended pregnancy rates are higher among women who are in their early 20s, who have low income, who are less educated, and who are black.² Appropriate contraceptive use can reduce the rate of unintended pregnancy.

The Healthy People 2020 objectives prioritize the need to reduce the rate of unintended pregnancies, reduce pregnancy rates among adolescents, and increase contraceptive use.⁴ To increase access to effective contraceptive methods and subsequently reduce the national unintended pregnancy rate, experts have highlighted the importance of increasing pharmacy involvement in this area.⁵⁻⁷ Pharmacists are underused resources in the provision of health care services, specifically reproductive services.⁵ Pharmacists are easily accessible, can be seen without an appointment, and are trusted health-care professionals.^{6,7} In a recent review by Farris et al.,

the rationale for the role of pharmacists and pharmacy staff in reducing unintended pregnancy was identified, highlighting that pharmacists may assist with ensuring appropriate contraceptive use and adherence and monitoring for adverse effects, and that pharmacists may provide information on nonprescription contraceptive products. In fact, condoms are the third most widely used contraceptive product, and many are purchased at pharmacies.⁸ In addition, pharmacies are one of the major providers of emergency contraception, which has recently been approved as an over-the-counter (OTC) product for women of all ages.⁹ This furthers the importance of effective counseling by pharmacists and pharmacy staff on the safe and appropriate use of contraceptives.

Pharmacists in community pharmacies may also present an opportunity to increase access to hormonal contraceptives. Landau et al. highlighted a new model to increase access to hormonal contraception through pharmacists, known as the pharmacy access model.⁷ In this model, women are able to obtain hormonal contraception directly from pharmacists without first visiting their physician.

This model was used successfully by Gardner et al. in 26 community pharmacies across metropolitan Seattle, where pharmacists screened, prescribed, and counseled women on hormonal contraceptives. At the completion of the study, nearly all of the women were satisfied with the service and felt comfortable receiving prescriptions for hormonal contraception from their pharmacists. Pharmacists also felt confident offering the service and thought it was important to increase accessibility to contraceptives in pharmacies.¹⁰

Hormonal contraceptives could be offered OTC under the new medication category that FDA proposed in 2012. This category of medication was proposed to be “pharmacist only”; medications in this category would require the consultation of a pharmacist before sale. Having hormonal contraceptives listed under this new medication category would increase access to hormonal contraceptives for women pharmacy consumers and still ensure safety.¹¹

Before implementing a pharmacy access model to provide contraceptives in community pharmacies, it is important to document the contraception services that community pharmacies currently provide. Understanding the frequency of pharmacy patronage as well as how young women characterize their experiences with contraceptives in pharmacies is important in considering what interventions are necessary and whether they are feasible.

Many studies in the United States and abroad have investigated the provision of emergency contraceptive products.¹²⁻¹⁷ However, little is known about other contraceptive services offered by community pharmacies, including availability of condoms and oral contracep-

Key Points

Background:

- To increase access to effective contraceptive methods and subsequently reduce the national unintended pregnancy rate, experts have highlighted the importance of increasing pharmacy involvement in this area.
- Little is known about contraceptive services offered by community pharmacies, including availability of condoms and oral contraception, availability of contraceptive information, and ability of pharmacists to counsel on pregnancy prevention.

Findings:

- Young women visit and purchase contraceptives from community pharmacies frequently.
- Few women were very comfortable or thought it was easy to talk with their regular pharmacy staff about contraception; this was reflected in the number of women who had previously spoken to pharmacy staff about contraception.
- Observed pharmacy characteristics such as opening hours, condom availability, staff race and gender may not be particularly important in considering future interventions.
- In the future, interventions should focus on improving existing communication and initiating new communication strategies.

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