

Book Review

Contraception — Your Questions Answered

John Guillebaud
Churchill Livingstone (2004)
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Hands up anyone who knows the only significant contraindication to progestogen use?

This and hundreds of questions like it are answered in the fourth and latest edition of John Guillebaud's *Contraception — Your Questions Answered*. This book was written specifically for those working in the field of contraception and family planning but is useful for anyone working in a related area where practical information about the various reversible methods of contraception is required. This book can also be used to provide the contraceptive user with concise answers to the specific questions not generally covered in standard information sheets.

Guillebaud is something of a guru to those working in the field of contraception. He presently occupies the position of Emeritus Professor of Family Planning and Reproductive Health at University College London and because of this the book is intended primarily for the British market. Readers will notice then that some of the contraceptive methods described in this book are not available in Australia and conversely some methods are likely to be available here before they are released in Britain. However, as Internet communication and global commuting create an ever shrinking world these differences between countries are likely to become less relevant with time. Guillebaud's main strength is his very readable, easy-to-understand writing style. The book is written in a question and answer format and comprehensively covers all the contraceptive methods currently available, as well as providing tantalising glimpses of future options. Sandwiched around the chapters on contraceptive methods, the first and last chapters offer a much more personal view. In these the author writes of his hopes for a world in which every person is able to plan when and if they have children and where every child is a wanted one. His approach is that the delivery of effective contraception involves a unique collaboration between the clinician and the potential user. Guillebaud's commitment to the concept of population control as a means of improving the lot of all those who share this planet is obvious. He prefaces the book for instance with his belief in the saying that 'We have not inherited this world from our grandparents — we have borrowed it from our grandchildren'.

Each chapter begins with a list of numbered questions arranged under subheadings (highlighted in Schiaparelli pink so you can't miss them!!) and ends with a list of additional questions that are likely to be asked by the

contraceptive user. The overall format is logical and easy to navigate and the tables and illustrations included are well chosen and complement the information presented in the text.

The chapter on human fertility and natural methods of contraception deals with the basic physiology of reproduction and the various methods available to those who for religious or philosophical reasons find other methods of contraception unacceptable. It also describes the use of the hand-held fertility computers not presently available in Australia, which have the potential to improve the success rates of these natural methods. The next chapter covers the contraceptive methods available to males and includes some practical advice on avoiding condom breakages. The chapter on female barrier methods comprehensively discusses the use of diaphragms, cervical caps, and female condoms.

There are two chapters on combined contraception. The first contains information on the appropriate selection of patients for contraceptive methods that contain oestrogen, and the other chapter deals with ongoing follow-up. In the latter the author also discusses possible advantages of some of the newer delivery systems in this class, such as contraceptive patches and vaginal rings.

Two chapters are devoted to progestogen-only contraception (pills, implants, and injectables) and look at some of the new developments in this field as well. The author deals with such practical issues as the additional counselling involved when a long-acting method of contraception is being considered and also gives some suggestions as to how to manage troublesome bleeding in women using these methods. A chapter on intrauterine devices, including the newer progestogen-bearing IUD, goes a long way to dispelling some of the prejudice that still exists in this country regarding the use of these devices. When discussing emergency contraception the author covers some of the public health issues implicit when considering contraception occurring 'after the event'. He also describes the newer recommendations regarding ECP use, such as its use as a single rather than a divided dose and the fact that it retains some effectiveness up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

Those considering the book from a sexual health background may feel that the lack of attention paid to both sexually transmitted infection risk and the complexities of sexual behaviour and gender roles is a weakness of this book. Guillebaud states up front however that such issues are not

the focus of *Contraception — Your Questions Answered*, but that in no way should this indicate that he feels they are unimportant. It is also difficult sometimes to determine whether the advice given is evidence-based or simply represents the opinion and undoubted clinical experience of the author. There are, however, more references and suggested further readings in this edition than in previous ones and this is certainly a step in the right direction.

Contraception — Your Questions Answered is a valuable and accessible resource to anyone needing an up-to-date reference on contraceptive methods. As new contraceptive methods emerge over time and science provides more solutions to those questions still unanswered, Guillebaud

should be able to continue to re-edit this volume indefinitely — in fact as long as he is happy to wear his guru mantle.

And the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this review — porphyria....but then you all knew that already, didn't you?!

Dr Terri Foran
Sexual Health Physician, Taylor Square Clinic,
Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia.