

FIGO Human Rights and Women's Health Case

Contraceptive of choice

Z.B., a 35-year-old mother of four children (all under the age of 10 years), requests advice on effective methods of contraception. Her 11-month-old son was conceived while she was taking oral contraceptive pills. Although she took the pills regularly, on one occasion she was unable to obtain a new pack until almost a week after she was scheduled to begin them and during that period she became pregnant. She thinks that an intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD) might be better for her. Both oral contraceptive pills and IUCDs are available at this clinic. Z.B.'s last routine examination was 19 months ago, at the time of her first pregnancy consultation. She has no health complaints and no contraindications for either method of contraception.

The clinic doctor sees her at the end of a very busy day that has included two emergency procedures, 35 additional patients, and no lunch break. The doctor has a personal appointment immediately following clinic and Z.B. is her last patient for the day. She reviews Z.B.'s record and chooses not to conduct a physical examination. Dismissing Z.B.'s questions about the IUCD, she tells Z.B. that the pill is her best option. She quickly writes a prescription for oral contraceptives and leaves the clinic without advising Z.B. on follow-up.

One year later, Z.B. returns to the clinic, pregnant again. During the course of her examination she is found to have a lesion on her cervix. A biopsy reveals cervical cancer.

Questions for discussion

1. What are the medical issues in this case? Specifically:
 - a. What are the health risks and benefits of oral contraceptives, IUCDs, and pregnancy?
 - b. What routine screening is recommended at the time of counseling for contraception?
2. Using the Integrating Human Rights and Health Checklist, identify the human rights that were infringed in this case.
3. In what ways did the physician provide or deny optimal health care to Z.B.?
4. What laws and policies in your country/state/province address the issue of neglecting to provide proper care to patients?
5. What changes in policies and practices in this clinic would better ensure that all patients receive the highest standard of care possible?

