

# Professional briefing for fpa's Contraceptive Awareness Week 2008



## *The New Man: Men and contraception*

Having sex and becoming pregnant is not just a 'woman thing' – it takes two. Historically, women have always carried the responsibility for reproductive health, morbidity and mortality. However, before the advent of modern methods of contraception in the mid 20th century, women relied heavily on the cooperation of men in the use of methods such as withdrawal, periodic abstinence and condoms.

Nowadays, women living in the UK can choose from a range of very safe and extremely reliable contraceptive methods. This in effect absolves men from having to make contraceptive decisions or take part in using contraception to prevent pregnancy. This has altered the male-female balance in contraception and has helped contribute to women's reproductive emancipation. It has also led to a decrease in men's involvement in contraception and control over their own reproductive health.

Things are changing and it is recognised that this decrease in men's involvement needs to be reversed. Men should be attending clinics for their own needs, not just as a support to women. With rising rates of unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV there are strong expectations that men should be involved in 'safer sex' and have a positive role in reproductive health and childrearing decision making.

Other than attendance at genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, men remain the minority users of sexual health services.

However, according to *NHS Contraceptive Services, England 2006–07*, young men attending community contraception clinics for the first time rose by 20 per cent on the previous year's attendance figures. This is a trend to be encouraged. Healthcare professionals need support to examine and reassess the balance between men and women's sexual health needs and in turn, improve and make services more male friendly.

The following Questions and answers will help professionals working in a variety of different settings to target services towards men, with the aim of improving men's sexual health, not just in terms of infection, but across all areas of reproduction.

### **Q. What are the issues concerning men and sexual health?**

- ▶ Men tend to have less accurate factual knowledge of contraception than women and often receive less sex and relationships education at home.
- ▶ There may be a general ignorance around sex which they are unwilling to admit to.
- ▶ Men are more likely to seek help when their sexual performance or function is affected.

### **Q. What do/might men want/want to know when attending services?**

- ▶ Everything! Men's first sexual experience, activity or relationship will often motivate their initial contact with a sexual health service.
- ▶ To get advice about using and/or a supply of condoms (up to 93 per cent of men attend for this reason).
- ▶ To provide support to their female partner (up to 73 per cent attend with a partner and half of these are involved in the consultation).

## Q. How do we support men to be more aware and involved in sexual health issues?

- ▶ Make sure they know who they can approach for help.
- ▶ Make sure we are getting the message across to women. Men often rely on women to find out about services and/or to educate them about contraception and sexual health.
- ▶ Make clear what services the clinic provides. Men may only see you providing information about 'illness' rather than advice and/or support.
- ▶ Engage/include them with the issues.
- ▶ Make the subject more positive.
- ▶ Be prepared to talk openly with them to help overcome any embarrassment.
- ▶ Motivate them to recognise what their sexual health needs are.
- ▶ Actively promote other relevant services or agencies that can help including helplines and websites.
- ▶ Promote positive attitudes to men among staff.
- ▶ Improve men's confidence/trust in health professionals and services.
- ▶ Be inclusive. Sexuality, masculinity and associated issues can be predominantly seen as heterosexual.

## Q. How can we improve services so that men want to use them?

- ▶ Think about where services are placed. Consider outreach clinics/sessions in places where men are likely to be more comfortable.
- ▶ Display information about confidentiality in a public area of the clinic as men have concerns about confidentiality.
- ▶ GUM clinics should consider providing more contraceptive advice and contraceptive clinics should consider providing more advice on STIs.
- ▶ Display posters/leaflets targeting men specifically.
- ▶ Encourage 'word of mouth' endorsements and promote your service through local projects, youth clubs, the school health service and general practices.
- ▶ Produce information about what actually happens at the clinic to help dispel any myths about tests and treatments.
- ▶ Advertise that you provide a wide range of different condoms, including shape and size.
- ▶ Make sure men know your services are for them so they feel welcome to come along.
- ▶ Make the environment less woman orientated. Provide men's magazines and health information in the public spaces.
- ▶ Consider the name of the service. *Family planning clinic* implies couples in stable relationships. *Sexual health clinic* implies a more holistic approach, inclusive to men.
- ▶ Respond to the views/needs of men by asking them to evaluate the service provided. Look at previous research or do your own.
- ▶ Have a male presence among staff, including those on reception.
- ▶ Involve men in the design of services through focus groups or through evaluation and feedback.

## Contact:

**fpa's Sexual Health Direct** helpline gives confidential information and advice to professionals and the public. Tel: 0845 122 8690, 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday or visit **fpa's website [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)**.

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