Doctors Urged to Discuss Emergency Contraception

BY MIRIAM E. TUCKER  
Senior Writer

WASHINGTON — Physicians should routinely inform women of childbearing age about the availability of emergency contraception before the need arises, James Trussell, Ph.D., said at a conference on contraceptive technology sponsored by Contemporary Forums.

In fact, he recommends prescribing or dispensing the pills in advance to make the option immediately available if necessary.

Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States, or about 3 million per year, are unintended. If emergency contraception were widely available and widely used, that number could be cut in half and result in 0.7 million fewer abortions and 22,000 fewer pregnancies due to rape, said Dr. Trussell, professor of economics and public affairs and director of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University, N.J.

“That’s the potential, but we’re nowhere near realizing that potential,” he said.

Indeed, according to Dr. Trussell’s estimates based on a national study, there were just 2 million sales of Plan B to pharmacies and family planning programs last year, but there were 75 million cycles per year in which unprotected intercourse occurred among women at risk of an unintended pregnancy.

In 1997, the Food and Drug Administration declared six brands of regular oral contraceptives safe and effective for use as emergency contraception. That number now is up to 19, although Plan B (two 0.75-mg levonorgestrel tablets taken 12 hours apart within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse) currently is the only product approved and licensed in the United States for that purpose. (Preven was licensed in 1998 but Barr Laboratories, which also owns Plan B, removed it from the U.S. market in 2004.)

In a 2003 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.

In a 2003 survey, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.

In a 2003 survey, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.

In a 2003 survey, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.

In a 2003 survey, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.

In a 2003 survey, 80% of ob.gyns. and 36% of generalists reported that they had prescribed emergency contraception during the past year.