“THEY’RE NOT THE EVIL THING THAT WE WERE TRAINED TO THINK THEY ARE”: GP PERSPECTIVES OF PRESCRIBING INTRAUTERINE CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES

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Background: Appropriate use of contraception in the prevention of unplanned pregnancy is a major health issue in Australia. Long acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), such as the intrauterine-contraceptive device (IUCD), have very low failure rates due to being non-user-dependent. Guidelines currently recommend LARCs as first line contraception for all women. Globally, 14.3% of women use IUCDs; in Australia, the use is negligible at 1.3%. The aim of this study was to investigate barriers faced by Australian GPs in the prescription and uptake of IUCDs, particularly amongst young and nulliparous women.

Methods: 17 Victorian GPs participated in a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews between February-May 2016. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure a mix of gender, years since training, rural and urban practice, and current IUCD inserters, non-inserters, and previous inserters. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. New GPs were interviewed until no new issues emerged.

Results: A range of misperceptions brought to the consult on the part of both patients and doctors were identified as barriers to IUCD use, as was the lack of current GP inserters. Barriers to insertion were lack of available training, training costs, and potential deskill with low patient volume. Issues identified for patients referred for insertion included time, cost, and risk of pregnancy while awaiting insertion.

Conclusion: Barriers to prescribing IUCDs creates challenges for women in accessing the full range of contraceptive options, and the ability to make educated choices about their contraception. This study has highlighted strategies which could increase the uptake of IUCDs, including local directories of inserters maintained by Primary Health Networks, and promotion of IUCDs targeting young women via social-media and in GP waiting rooms. Increased IUCD training opportunities for GPs is necessary to expand the number of current inserters, and thus to improve access to contraceptive options for all women.