Thoughts on the recent pill scare

**Why and what?**

In the UK there has been an increased use of LARC and other Progesterone only methods (doubled between 2010-2020).

Known that combined oral contraception has slight increased risk of breast cancer but no clear data on the progesterone methods.

An observational nested case control study looking at GP records for women diagnosed with invasive breast cancer under 50 years (9,498) between 1995 and 2017 and matched individuals (18,171).

Findings that **ALL Progesterone methods caused an increase in breast cancer risk similar to the combined oral contraceptive pill.**

* When findings for oral contraceptives are combined with results from previous studies (which included women in a wider age range), they suggest that the 15-year absolute excess risk of breast cancer associated with use of oral contraceptives ranges from 8 per 100,000 users (an increase in incidence from 0.084% to 0.093%) for use from age 16 to 20 to about 265 per 100,000 users (from 2.0% to 2.2%) for use from age 35 to 39.

In other words the overall risk is still VERY LOW but will increase with age as the background risk increases with age, and the numbers are similar for the LARCs.

As with the COCP the increased risk returns to normal in 10 years of stopping the method.

The advice is to discuss this risk with women in context of risks of pregnancy and other advantages of contraception (period control, endometriosis treatment, skin, reproductive health and reduction in ovarian and endometrial cancers). The risks of breast cancer from excess alcohol, smoking and overweight still outweigh these small risks of breast cancer in young women.

This is the faculty advise on the report:

<https://www.fsrh.org/news/fsrh-response-to-new-study-on-use-of-combined-and-progestogen/>

***Dr Helen Munro, Vice-President, Clinical Quality of the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare said:*** *“First of all, I would like to reassure women that the level of risk involved remains small and you should not feel that you need to stop taking the pill or using other forms of hormonal contraception because of this new research.
“Despite the small increased risk regarding breast cancer, contraceptive pills have also been shown to actually decrease the risk of developing ovarian or womb cancer. It is notable that many other factors, such as exercise, alcohol intake and smoking have far greater impact on breast cancer rates amongst women.
“This research must be viewed in the context of the well-established benefits of oral contraceptive use such as preventing unplanned pregnancies, reducing the risk of certain cancers, and protecting against acute pelvic inflammatory disease and ectopic pregnancies.
“Finally, it is also worth highlighting that women are most likely to use contraceptives under the age of 50, when the risk of breast cancer is much lower than in older age categories”.*