

INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FRENCH COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS IN THE DISPENSING OF EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

F. Blanchet¹, V. Belot² and C. Dreux¹

¹ Sanitary and Social Education Committee for French Pharmacy (CESPHARM)

² Social Security (CNAMTS) - public health department

Cespharm +
ÉDUCATION ET PRÉVENTION
POUR LA SANTÉ

CONTEXT

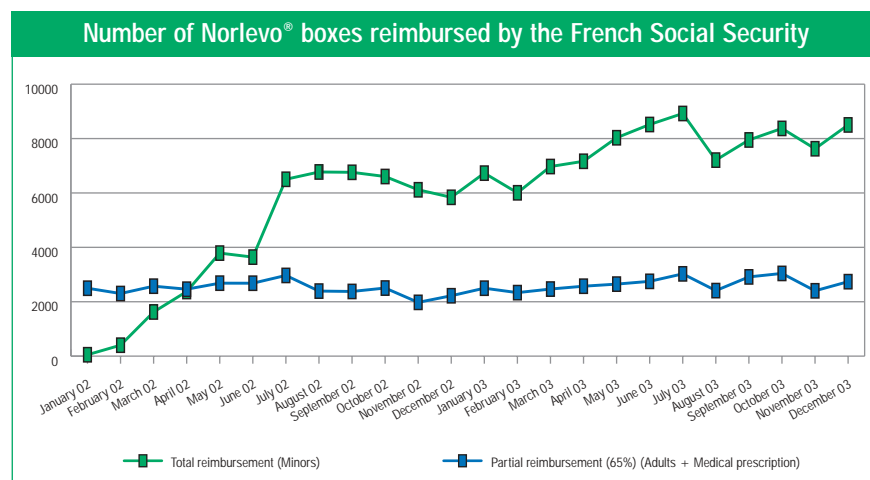
The French situation

In France, emergency hormonal contraception (EHC) – levonorgestrel (Norlevo®) – became available without a medical prescription in 1999. Since January 2002, French community pharmacists have to provide free EHC to minors.

In French community pharmacies, EHC can be obtained :

- free of charge and anonymously for minors
- without a medical prescription and anonymously for all women (not reimbursed)
- with a medical prescription (reimbursed by the Social Security - 65%).

The evolutions of the number of Norlevo® boxes totally and partially reimbursed by the Social Security from January 2002 to December 2003 are presented below.



The educative mission of pharmacist

Since January 2002, pharmacists have the legal obligation to conduct a detailed « consultation » with the minors requiring EHC :

- to evaluate the appropriateness of EHC supply
- to provide advice on EHC : proper use and side effect profile of EHC
- to provide information on standard methods of regular contraception, sexually transmitted infections prevention and the importance of a medical follow-up.

The pharmacist has to complete this information by giving documentation in these fields to the minors.

INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS

The Sanitary and Social Education Committee for French Pharmacy (CESPHARM) and the Social Security (CNAMTS) entered in partnership to support pharmacists in this educative mission towards young people.

Professional information on EHC

Professional information on EHC was first provided to all pharmacists through the journal of the National Council of Pharmacists (January 2002) :

- proper use of EHC
- side effects of EHC
- special warnings and precautions for use
- behaviour toward any request for EHC...

Conception and diffusion of tools for pharmacists

Different tools were designed by a working group composed of pharmacists, gynaecologists, professionals working in family planning services. These tools were then proposed to pharmacists :

■ A special leaflet for the pharmacist to be given with the medication

Objectives : to support pharmacists in their educative mission during the dispensing of EHC to minors.

This leaflet covers all information to be given by the pharmacist when dispensing the EHC :

- How to take the medication ?
- The potential side effects of EHC
- What to do after taking EHC ?
- How to know if EHC was effective ?
- Special warnings : prevention of sexually transmitted infections, importance of a more effective regular contraception and a medical follow-up...

This leaflet was distributed to all French pharmacies in January 2002 and then remained available free on request from the CESPHARM.

A new version of this leaflet was printed in December 2003 according to the new recommendations concerning the administration of Norlevo® (intake of two tablets in a single administration within 72 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse).



→ 1.5 million leaflets distributed in 2002-2003

■ An information card on EHC to be widely distributed to the public

Objectives : to make the public aware of the existence but also the limits of EHC.

This information card contains general information on EHC :

- What is EHC ?
- When should it be used ?
- Where and how can it be obtained ?
- Special warnings : prevention of sexually transmitted infections, importance of a regular contraception and a medical follow-up.



The cards were printed and available for pharmacists in December 2003. They were distributed free on request to pharmacists and local centres of Social Security.

→ 1.8 million cards distributed between December 2003 and June 2004

■ Specific versions of these tools for French overseas regions (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana, and Reunion Island)

Objectives : to adapt these tools (leaflet and card) to French overseas regions, taking into account their local resources.

Indeed, the abortion rate in French overseas regions is 2 (Martinique and Reunion Island) to 3 (Guadeloupe and French Guyana) times higher than the national rate¹.

Addresses of local associations involved in sexual health (contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted infections...) and family planning services were added on leaflets and cards.

These documents were printed and available for pharmacists in December 2003.



→ 200 000 leaflets and 500 000 cards distributed locally in the 4 French overseas regions

CONCLUSION

In order to prevent unintended pregnancies and to minimise the numbers of abortion among teenage girls, the French Health Authorities decided in 2002 to facilitate access to EHC for minors. The availability of free EHC for minors in community pharmacies offered French pharmacists new roles and responsibilities. The educative mission of the pharmacist while dispensing EHC to minors is particularly important :

- to avoid potential adverse influence of EHC : abandon of more efficient permanent forms of contraception, abandon of an appropriate medical follow-up.
- to prevent a potential increase in the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections.

Moreover, the dispensing of EHC constitutes for the pharmacists a real opportunity to get into contact with teenagers and to introduce themselves as proximity health care professionals.

The initiatives implemented by the CESPHARM and the French Social Security should contribute to support pharmacists in their role in prevention and health education in the field of EHC and more generally toward young people.

¹ - DREES (Direction de la Recherche, des Etudes, de l'Evaluation et des Statistiques) – French Ministry of Health, Dec. 2003