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Women's Health Update

Introduction:

The Women's Health Update Course is held around the country, throughout the year. I attended at the beginning of November last year, in Nottingham, as I was keen to enhance my skills and knowledge in this particular sub-speciality. It was an area I had identified as not specifically being covered in our Sport & Exercise Medicine curriculum, but which I wanted to update myself in and when working within elite women's sport, an area I am commonly asked questions about.

Article:

Why is Women's Health so important?

Historically a lot of gynecology and reproductive health issues were referred to secondary care. New innovations and the proven efficacy of primary care based therapies mean that many women's health issues can be managed, at least initially, in general practice or by a team physician.

In the UK, the contraceptive pill and condom remain the two most commonly used contraceptive methods. The Office of National Statistics survey data (2008/2009)1 indicates that among women aged 16–29 years who were at risk of pregnancy, 78% were using the contraceptive pill and/or the condom (46% and 47%, respectively, 15% used both).1 Long-acting reversible methods of contraception (LARC) (i.e. the pro-gestogen-only implant, injectable and intrauterine methods) are used by a minority of women,1 but there is a trend towards increasing use.[2] Use of the pro-gestogen-only injectable and implant is greater in young women compared with older women.[1]

The topic of menstrual cycles and athlete periods has certainly had increased coverage in the press over recent years. Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui in the 2016 Summer Olympics openly spoke about having her period during the tournament and not using it as an excuse for winning the bronze medal. This is an area in elite sport where the Science and Medicine team can help optimize athlete performance and having up to date knowledge of the options available is important.

The day itself, began with an introduction to the Fallopian Family! Many Women's health problems are categorized by symptom rather than diagnosis, eg, heavy menstrual bleeding, pelvic pain, and this is how the topics of the day were structured around case scenarios - and so the Fallopian Family were created!

Each member of the female based dynasty had a specific gynaecological problem and we accompanied them on their 'patient journey' through investigation, diagnosis and management by Dr Fraser. A fictitious GP who practices outside the realm of the real world, where guidelines and GMC code of conduct do not appear to exist, making room for light hearted interludes and medical comedy!

By attending the course you receive a substantially sized, printed copy of the Women's Health Update Handbook, which includes the most important research in primary care over the last 5 years and covers the subjects more extensively than is possible in a one day course. Subscription to the online GP Update handbook for 12 months is also included in the fee of the course and something which I have certainly used since attending the day.

Learning what's new in contraception, investigating amenorrhea and managing menorrhagia and bleeding issues were the main topics of the day which I found most relevant to my daily practice. Meeting the Seven Dwarves of Menopause was a scary look into my future - Itchy, Bitchy, Sleepy, Sweaty, Bloated, Forgetful and Psycho! The only similarity to any SEM course or conference I have previously attended was when we were asked at numerous break points to stand up - but not because it was good for our physical activity levels - a pelvic floor exercise practical ensued.

I would like to thank BASEM for awarding me with the BASEM External Meeting Sponsorship Award, which allowed me to attend this course. It was refreshing to attend such a day outside of my speciality and the format was certainly entertaining and engaging. I would recommend it to anyone, who like myself did not do GP training, and has received minimal training in these areas or simply feels their knowledge requires updating. It's certainly not a course I will forget in a hurry!

References

1. Office for National Statistics. Contraception and Sexual Health 2008/2009.
2. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. NICE Implementation Uptake Report: Long-acting Reversible Contraception (LARC). 2009.