



Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare

Statement from the Clinical Effectiveness Unit in response to news reports of a link between combined oral contraceptive pills and glaucoma.

November 2013

Following a presentation at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology a number of media reports have reported a possible link between use of combined oral contraception (COC) and glaucoma.

Speaking at the conference in New Orleans, Professor Shan Lin of the University of California at San Francisco reported an apparent doubling in risk of glaucoma associated with use of the combined oral contraceptive pill for three years or more.

The preliminary data has not yet been published in a peer reviewed journal. The Clinical Effectiveness Unit has therefore been unable to review the findings in any detail.

Glaucoma is a serious condition as it can result in visual impairment if left untreated.

The preliminary findings are interesting and warrant further investigation. However, the CEU is unable to comment further at this stage on the findings until a paper has been published.

There is limited data investigating combined hormonal contraceptives on glaucoma. One cohort study suggested that 5 or more years of COC use was associated with a 25% increase in the risk of glaucoma⁽¹⁾. Two UK cohort studies did not find consistent evidence of an increased risk⁽²⁾.

The CEU would **not advise that women stop their contraceptive pill** in light of these initial findings.

Women who are concerned about glaucoma should seek advice from their GP/optician.

Further information on glaucoma is available at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Glaucoma/Pages/introduction.aspx>

Reference List

- (1) Pasquale LR, Kang JH. Female reproductive factors and primary open-angle glaucoma in the Nurses Health Study. *Eye* 2011; 25(5); 633-641.
- (2) Vessey MP, Hannaford P, Mant J, Painter R, Frith P, Chappel D. Oral contraception and eye disease: findings in two large cohort studies. *British Journal of Ophthalmology* 1998;82:538-42.