

# NOT SO SAFE



## A NURSE WRITES ON THE DANGERS OF THE PILL

**W**riting in the Journal of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation recently, nurse Carolyn Johnston has pointed out that health professionals have failed to inform women of the dangers associated with the birth control pill. She wrote:

"Widely prescribed, widely used, socially accepted, rarely discussed in a negative manner and rarely discredited or criticised openly by health professionals. I think you will agree that this describes how the contra-

I find it fascinating to hear how women who take this medication on a daily basis generally don't know how it works, the dangers that are associated with it, that they can conceive while taking it 'correctly,' or that the bleed experienced when you take the "break" is not a normal menstrual period. Women are obviously being un-informed and misinformed by health professionals (mainly GPs) regarding this drug. New and existing research has been published regarding the dangers of taking the Pill

Birth control may be generally reliable but it is far from safe. Some of the lesser mentioned possible negative side-effects of the pill include migraine, headaches, dizziness, retinal thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, myocardial infarction, depression, nervousness and pre menstrual syndrome. This list is not exhaustive.

There is a vast amount of research available in relation to side-effects. One study from Boston University, the University of Pennsylvania and

## NOT SO SAFE... RECENT DEATHS FROM THE PILL



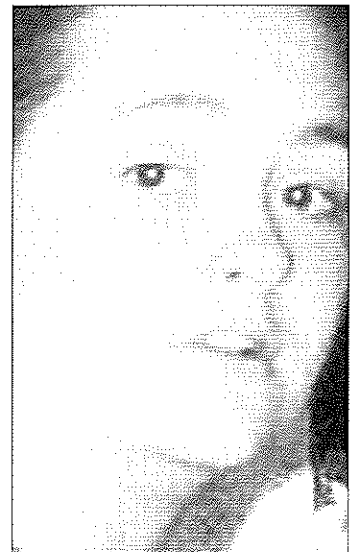
*Tanya Hayes, 24-year-old, who was using the Pill as part of her acne treatment. Associate Prof Graeme Thomson, said her death had been "caused by blood clotting caused by factors related to taking the pill".*



*Helen Schofield died from a blood clot just three months after she started taking a contraceptive pill. The coroner dealing with her case said there was a "pronounced" link between her death and the drug.*



*Jenna Morris, 28, died after deep vein thrombosis developed in her legs and spread to her lungs. A post mortem examination revealed she died of a blood clot, possibly caused by contraceptive pills.*



*An inquest in Birmingham was told that mother of two, Amanda Hopkins, aged 28, was killed by a blood clot because she was overweight and taking the contraceptive pill*

ceptive pill is portrayed. For many women, birth control pills are promoted as the only safe and reliable option for contraception.

which cannot be ignored anymore by pharmaceutical companies, health professionals or physicians who prescribe this drug.

Sloan Kettering was limited to breast cancer in women diagnosed before the age of 45. It stated that: "[Our] results suggest that oral contraceptive users, particularly those with very

long duration of use, may be at increased risk of breast cancer." They also said that "this study provides new evidence to suggest that the risk of breast cancer is increased among women below the age of 45 years who have used oral contraceptives. The risk appeared to be approximately doubled for use of less than ten years' duration and quadrupled for ten or more years of use."

There are no studies to secure safety of birth control pill usage over time.

Another fact about the pill that many women will be saddened to hear is that you can conceive and subsequently miscarry due to the abortifacient properties of the pill whilst taking it. I know this will be a huge surprise to many, and again I reiterate the question: why don't health professionals tell women of these dangers?

Women can experience breakthrough ovulation and no woman knows when that's happening in her body. The pill disrupts the lining of the womb creating a hostile environment for the egg to implant thus preventing this. Norplant works this way. The IUD works this way. Depo-Provera works this way.

When there is evidence to suggest a medication can have negative outcomes, this should be made known. Otherwise, half-truths literally cost peoples their lives. It may sound dramatic, and although death may not be a common outcome from taking the contraceptive pill, it has happened and it deserves our attention.

I came across an article in the Irish Independent (August 2007) concerning the heartbreaking story of a 31 year old finance company manager called Julie Hennessy. This young woman from Dublin was found dead in her apartment.

This lady was a non smoker and a healthy weight, who died of a massive pulmonary embolism due to a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Pathologist Peter Szontagh-Kishazi told Dublin County Coroner's Court that the contraceptive pill was the cause of Julie Hennessy's DVT.

Her devastated father Ray spoke after the inquest into his daughter's death: "The Pill was the major cause of our daughter's death and we want to put it on record that other young women should be aware of these dangers.

"Doctors are aware of the risks but I want to warn young women of the possible consequences of taking it. I wouldn't like this to happen to another family," said Mr Hennessy.

I have come across a lot of interesting articles, literature and personal stories regarding contraceptive use. Most people will be surprised to even think there is reliable evidence-based research and literature showing a link to the pill and increased unplanned pregnancies, increase of STIs, and increase in abortion numbers.

On a personal note, I felt compelled to write this article due to a personal tragedy. Someone I know also died of the same cause as Julie Hennessy and I know for a fact this person was not informed properly. Medical professionals and others should look at the research and investigate the risks.

For some unfortunate young women, taking a tiny pill everyday has literally cost them their lives.

