

US teenagers think oral sex isn't real sex

A study of nearly 600 young California teenagers indicates that, having been told to be abstinent and warned of the dangers of sex such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, they have decided that oral sex is the safest choice (*Pediatrics* 2005;115:845-51).

Previous studies indicated that many young people choose to have oral sex rather than vaginal sex. In 1999 a study in the journal of the American Medical Association showed that US university students didn't think oral sex was real sex (*JAMA* 1999;281:275-7).

Publication of that study coincided with the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton, at which he denied sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, who had performed oral sex on him. Dr George Lundberg, editor of *JAMA*, was fired for publishing the article (*BMJ* 1999;318:213).

The authors of the *Pediatrics* study found that 20% of the teenagers had had oral sex and 14% had had vaginal sex. More participants (32%) thought they might have oral sex in the next six months than vaginal sex (26%).

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

"Fighting spirit" after cancer diagnosis does not improve outcome

Having a fighting spirit in response to a diagnosis of breast cancer does not improve the chances of survival, according to new research that tracked more than 500 women for 10 years. But women who were classed as having a helpless or hopeless response to their diagnosis were more likely to relapse or to die.

In the study, which was published online ahead of print in the *European Journal of Cancer* (doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2005.01.012), researchers looked at psychological responses to diagnosis and compared them with outcomes 10 years later.

The study followed 578 patients aged 18 to 75 years with early stage (I and II) breast cancer. After 10 years 307 women (53%) were alive and were without relapse, 49 (9%) were alive with relapse, and 221 (38%) had died. One patient was lost to follow-up.

After 10 years the risk of death from breast cancer or relapse in women with high initial scores of helplessness or hopelessness was greater than that in the other groups (adjusted hazard ratio 1.53 (95% confidence interval 1.11 to 2.11)). Having a high fighting spirit conferred no advantage in survival.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

Drug company is reprimanded by UK regulator

A drug company has been publicly reprimanded for trying to subvert a safety message issued by UK regulators for a drug used to treat depression and anxiety.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which monitors the safety of drugs, censured Wyeth last week after a health professional complained about the way that company representatives had openly questioned a safety warning on the drug venlafaxine (sold as Efexor and Efexor XL), a serotonin and noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor.

In December the Committee on Safety of Medicines warned of potential cardiac problems with the drug. Subsequent guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on the treatment of depression advises doctors to check electrocardiograms and blood pressure before the drug is prescribed and to consider monitoring cardiac function throughout treatment.

Wyeth does not accept the need for such measures and is appealing against the original ruling by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Lynn Eaton *London*

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency's press release on its decision is available at its website (www.mhra.gov.uk).

US black women are less likely to have genetic tests for breast cancer

Susan Mayor *London*

Black women who have close relatives with breast or ovarian cancer are nearly five times less likely to be offered genetic testing for these cancers than white women, a US study reported this week.

The case-control study looked at 408 women receiving primary healthcare services from the University of Pennsylvania Health System who had a first degree or second degree relative with breast or ovarian cancer (*JAMA* 2005;293:1729-36). The women were followed up from December 1999 to August 2003.

Just over half (217) received genetic counselling for BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene testing (and so were considered cases), while 191 women did not (controls). Testing for mutations in the genes, which confer a greater risk of breast and ovarian cancer, provides information about women's risk of breast and ovarian cancer that may affect decisions about prophylactic surgery, chemoprevention, and screening.

The results showed that women who underwent genetic counselling were significantly less likely to be black (7.4% of the women) than the controls (28.8%) (odds ratio 0.22 (95% confidence interval 0.12 to 0.40)). This association remained after adjustment was made for the probability of having a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation, socio-

economic characteristics, the women's perception of their risk of breast and ovarian cancer, attitudes about the risks and benefits of genetic testing, and whether the primary care physician had recommended the testing (adjusted odds ratio 0.28 (0.09 to 0.89)).

The study's lead researcher, Katrina Armstrong, from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, said: "Our results indicated racial disparities in the use of BRCA1/2 counselling are large and do not appear to be explained by differences in risk factors for carrying a BRCA1/2 mutation, socioeconomic factors, risk perception, attitudes, or primary care physician recommendations."

Dr Armstrong said that the lower rate of genetic testing in black women may be due to greater distrust of health care, which other studies have shown in black people. This distrust may apply particularly to new technologies such as genetic testing. Previous research has also shown that black people were more likely to be concerned about racial discrimination on the basis of genetic testing. She concluded: "The benefit of predictive genetic testing will not be fully realised unless these disparities can be addressed." □



Black women were almost five times less likely to have a genetic test than their white counterparts

CHARLES BENNETT/AP