

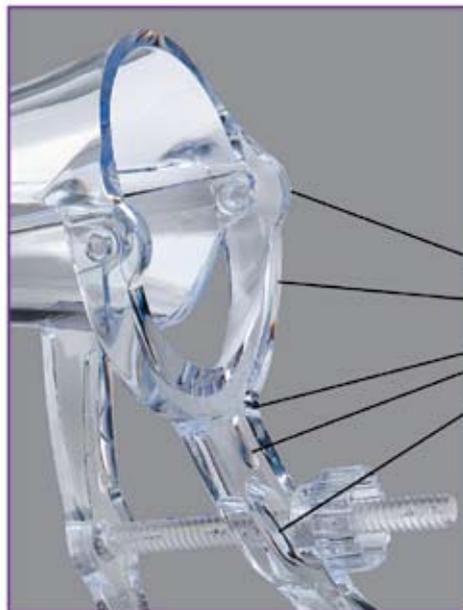
What is important?

Rachel Butson explores speculums and the fight against cervical cancer.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust is a UK charity committed to promoting awareness of cervical cancer and the importance of cervical screening. Robert Music, director, says cervical cancer is the second most common cancer amongst women in the UK under 35. Around three women die every day from cervical cancer with over 2,800 newly diagnosed each year. On top of that some 300,000 women a year are told they have a cervical abnormality that may require treatment.

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In 2007–8, 4.2m women were invited for screening with 1m (20 per cent) not attending and 34 per cent of the 25–29 age group not taking up their invitation. In 2008-9 statistics showed a marked increase in women going for screening and this is very much down to increased awareness through Jade Goody's battle against cervical cancer. Yet one in three women aged 25–34 still did not take up their screening invitation, despite this extraordinary awareness. In addition the numbers of girls aged 17–18 taking part in



Failsafe Points

● Failsafe points ensure in the event of a failure the device breaks outside the vagina.

the routine HPV vaccination 'catch up' programme may not even make 50 per cent.

Speculum choice

There are many things you will want to consider on choosing the most appropriate instrument for your practice:

- Do your practitioners like the chosen speculum within the surgery?
- Is single-use and full traceability important?
- Is safety important to you?

This article will take you through all of the above and hopefully give you the necessary information to make an informed choice regarding finding the most suitable speculum for your practice.

1. Do your practitioners like the chosen speculum within the surgery?

This is a fundamental point as I'm sure you are aware of the importance of

keeping everyone happy.

Free samples are often offered to ensure the product is suitable for your practice needs and on many occasions a company representative can organise a small trial to ensure the instrument fully meets your requirements before you even place your first order.

Does the manufacturer produce all the different sizes of speculum you require to cater for individual patient requirements, to optimise comfort and ensure a successful examination?

Five sizes are available within the market place and many companies have all five sizes within a range to ensure you can remain with one manufacturer for consistency of features.

Many practitioners feel happier using a speculum that has consistent features for ease of use. There are many single-use speculums that are identical in terms of design to the metal equivalent but have



Rachel Butson

is marketing manager at Pelican Healthcare

the benefits of full visibility via the clear walls of the speculum, and enhanced comfort for the patient as the smooth rounded ends will minimise discomfort during insertion and removal.

A secure and quiet locking mechanism ensures that the speculum remains in place throughout the procedure and frees up the hands of the medical professional. This system is generally much quieter on a plastic single-use speculum which improves the experience for the patient.

2. Is traceability important?

You may be looking to switch to a single-use speculum following new legislation regarding tracking and traceability systems.

Switching to single-use can save you money on sterilisation costs and at the same time ensures peace of mind to the clinician and patient. Traceability and documentation are paramount:

the confidence of knowing you have full traceability on any instrument is certainly reassuring. In the event of a complaint manufacturers will always require both lot number and unique identification number to fully trace the instrument in question back to the point of manufacture.

3. Safety

Many speculums have built in failsafe points to ensure that in the unlikely event of failure the device breaks safely outside the vagina. Your manufacturer will be able to confirm the location of the failsafe points on your choice of speculum.

Does the speculum carry a CE mark to confirm it conforms to European standards? Vaginal speculum are medical devices and as such must carry a CE marking if marketed within Europe. The CE marking should be clearly indicated on the speculum packaging and is

your reassurance that the speculum complies with the relevant regulatory requirements.

We all have a vested interest in raising awareness of cervical cancer and ensuring compliance with the National Cervical Screening Programme.

Your choice of speculum is an important factor in encouraging future compliance, and all manufacturers should provide free samples and information regarding the quality and safety of their instruments to enable you to ensure you have confidence in your choice of vaginal speculum. ■

References available on request.

For further information visit Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust website at www.jostrust.org

For more information on Pelican Healthcare visit www.pelicanhealthcare.co.uk

HRT and pill can lead to breast cancer

Medical scientists have uncovered how hormone replacement therapy and contraceptive pills can lead to breast cancer, according to research published online by *Nature*. The findings raise the hope that hormone induced breast cancer may be prevented in future using a new treatment for the bone loss disease osteoporosis.

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers, affecting up to one in eight women during their lives in Europe, the UK and US. Large population studies such as the Women's Health Initiative and the Million Women Study have shown that synthetic sex hormones called progestins used in hormone replacement therapy, HRT, and in contraceptives can increase the risk of breast cancers.

Now medical researchers at the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna have identified a key mechanism which allows these synthetic sex hormones to directly affect mammary cells.

The research builds on previous work by Prof Josef Penninger, the IMBA director, who found the first genetic evidence that a protein called RANKL is the master regulator of healthy bones. In a complex system that regulates bone mass, RANKL activates the cells that break down bone material when it needs to be replaced. When the system goes wrong and we make too much of the protein it triggers bone loss, leading to osteoporosis in millions of patients around the world every year. Finding exactly the same molecule in breast tissues led the scientists to the new link between sex hormones and breast cancer.

The research team shows that a synthetic female sex hormone used in HRT and contraceptive pills can trigger RANKL in breast cells of mice. As a consequence, these mammary cells start to divide and multiply and fail to die when they should. Moreover, stem cells in the breast become able to renew themselves, ultimately resulting in breast cancer. ■

