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*\*\*\*\*\*IUDs subject of Dallas study.*

DALLAS--Researchers at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School are participating in a nationwide study to determine the risks involved in using intrauterine devices (IUDs) for contraception.

"We are one of eight research centers across the country that have begun collecting data to evaluate the risks of serious complications in women who wear IUDs," says Dr. Stephen Heartwell, director of UT Southwestern's maternal health and family planning program.

The collaborative effort is being funded by the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Heartwell recently received a grant of \$152,000 from NIH to conduct the Dallas part of the two-year study.

Because there are so many different kinds of IUDs and so many different problems thought to be associated with their use, a large-scale study was necessary to be able to draw any conclusions, explains Dr. Heartwell, who is also assistant professor of public health in obstetrics and gynecology and of family practice and community medicine at the Dallas medical school.

Since December questionnaires have been administered to all women between 17 and 44 years of age admitted to Dallas County's Parklawn Memorial Hospital and diagnosed as having one of seven specific serious complications.

The seven complications--which include perforation of the wall of the uterus, pelvic inflammatory disease and several different complications of pregnancy--may be linked to the use of IUDs.

The questionnaire will determine whether or not the patient wears an IUD and, if so, what type.

There are many IUDs of various shapes and sizes presently on the market. Dr. Heartwell says his staff is currently giving women who ask for IUDs either the Lippes loop or the Copper 7, two of the safest and most effective IUDs available.

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first add iuds

Another IUD, the Dalkon Shield, was recently taken off the market permanently after several women who had used it had become pregnant, miscarried and died.

However, most modern IUDs are considered to be a relatively safe method of birth control, Dr. Heartwell says. In fact, women using the devices have a lower risk of death rate than those taking the birth control pills. "So based on the evidence we have right now, there are fewer risks associated with IUDs."

Studies have shown that women on the pill run a higher than normal risk of life-threatening blood clots, which may cause strokes, heart attacks and lung problems.

Dr. Heartwell emphasizes that the risk of developing a serious of fatal illness as a consequence of either taking the pill or wearing an IUD is very small.

"With every method of contraception, the benefits must constantly be weighed against the risks," he says.

"Hopefully, this large study we are conducting will provide us with enough data to evaluate the risks for all of the IUDs in use today."

The idea of placing a small object in the uterus to prevent pregnancy has been around for a long time, Dr. Heartwell says. For over 2,000 years camel drivers have inserted pebbles into the uteri of their camels to prevent them from becoming pregnant during long desert journeys.

But it was not until the early 1960's that safe and effective IUDs were developed for women.

Exactly how the IUD works remains a mystery to medical scientists. One of a number of theories is that the device mechanically prevents implantation of the fertilized egg in the wall of the uterus. Certain kinds of IUDs are also thought to have a chemical effect.

IUDs are most effective for women who have been pregnant before. The uterus of a woman who has never been pregnant is much smaller and she often experiences severe pain during and immediately after insertion. Also, the IUD is much more likely to be spontaneously expelled.

Between 18 and 20 per cent of all women who have IUDs inserted either spontaneously expel them or have them removed because of side effects by the end of the first year.

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second add iuds

Although the birth control pill is theoretically more effective than the IUD, studies have shown that because women forget to take the pill, in actual use the IUD has a lower pregnancy rate.

Twelve per cent of the women who come to the Dallas family planning clinics for birth control select IUDs, Dr. Heartwell says.

UT Southwestern maternal health and the family planning program provides high-quality medical care and reproductive guidance free to any woman who lives in Dallas County. It is a federally-funded project operated by Southwestern Medical School in cooperation with the Dallas County Hospital District and the Dallas city and county health departments.

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