

Female Adolescent Health in SA family practice



Thinus Kruger

Adolescence. At this age, the young woman will start consulting her general practitioner on her own. She requires special guidance and advice on her journey to adult female health and wellbeing. When managing the female adolescent's health, the general practitioner may also have to deal with more complex relationships than with other patients. There may be an adolescent-parent-practitioner, adolescent-practitioner or sometimes just a practitioner-parent relationship. Each has challenges of its own.

The adolescent is trapped in a state between childhood and adulthood, and she is constantly bombarded by many worries, uncertainties and unanswered questions. Her inability to afford or to access healthcare facilities, naivety and ignorance may threaten her health and wellbeing.

The adolescent, therefore, needs access to an adolescent-friendly practice where health care and information are accessible, and dealt with confidentially. Very important and intimate decisions have to be made by her and she needs a knowledgeable, non-judgemental general practitioner who understands her needs and who will give her enough guidance to make informed

decisions, and the opportunity to do this herself. The general practitioner can play an enormous role in adolescent health risk management and should pro-actively inform his young patients about the risks and complications of unprotected sexual intercourse, drug abuse and mood disorders, among others.

Numerous ethical questions and issues arise during female adolescent health consultations. The consultation may also be very different



when a parent is present. The wrong question at the wrong time can ruin a trusting relationship between practitioner, adolescent and parent. Moral and religious issues are often involved and the practitioner has to put his or her beliefs aside and focus on the health risks and issues at hand. Preventing STI's, HIV and teenage pregnancies are more important than convincing the patient of the practitioner's own beliefs!

This issue of *SA Family Practice* is dedicated to four very important issues in female adolescent health.

The first article discusses ***HIV prevention and the generalist's role in sex education***. To quote the author: "It is a fact that the general practitioner has a vital role to play in the nation's fight against HIV/AIDS which threatens our most precious community, our youth." This article will prepare you for this challenge.

The second article is an excellent review of ***Contraception for first time users***.

The third article discusses ***Dysmenorrhoea***, a leading cause of recurrent, short-term absenteeism at school.

The last article is on ***Complications of body piercing***. This article gives very practical advice on dealing with site-specific infections and healing times and will enable the GP to discuss and treat the complications of this very common fashion fad.

We hope that these articles will bring new insights and be of practical help for the busy general practitioner and urge you to transform your practice into a female adolescent friendly environment.

Yours Sincerely

THINUS KRUGER MBChB (Pret), MMed(Pharm), FCOG (SA), FRCOG (Lond), MD(Stel)
Professor and Chairperson
Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
University of Stellenbosch