Reviewer's report

Title: Policy makers' and Providers' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding the Provision of Emergency Contraceptive Pills within Lao PDR

Version: 1 Date: 7 January 2010

Reviewer: Davida Becker

Reviewer's report:

This article reports on a qualitative study carried out in Lao PDR to learn more about health care providers and policymakers views on emergency contraception. Although emergency contraception has been included in the Lao Ministry of Health’s National Reproductive Health Policy since 2005, the method is still not widely available. The purpose of the study was to uncover some of the barriers to access to this contraceptive method and to suggest actions to improve its availability. The study contributes new information to the literature since no other study has investigated these issues in Lao PDR. I have several recommendations for the authors which I hope will strengthen the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. There is no information discussing the study’s limitations. This should be added to the discussion section.

2. The authors are inconsistent in their descriptions of the people they quote from. Sometimes they report the sex, age, sector of work (public or private), and job of the person (Ob/gyn, policymaker, etc.) but other times they only report some of this information. They should be consistent.

3. In the introduction, the authors’ mention that ECPs are not registered by the FDA in Lao PDR but it is unclear what this means in practice for the availability of ECP methods. Are no dedicated ECP products sold at all in pharmacies or offered through the health system (public and private)? One practice that is common in other countries where dedicated ECP products are not registered is for medical providers to prescribe women regular combined oral contraceptive pills in higher dosage which can be taken as emergency contraception. Does this happen in Lao PDR in either the public or private sector? Could women purchase regular combined oral contraceptive pills over the counter to make the method themselves?

4. In the section on study design, the authors describe the criteria they used to select public providers, but they do not describe their criteria they considered when selecting private providers and policymakers. This information should be added.

5. A sentence on page 14 states that “The Ministry does not currently allow use of ECP in Lao PDR, and there is no policy for its use.” This sentence conflicts with information presented earlier in the paper which states that ECP has been included in the Ministry of Health plan since 2005 (page 5). Please clarify.
6. On page 5, the authors state: “The additional methods were not suitable for implementation in the public sector and only available in some private clinics.” It is unclear why these methods were not “suitable.” Does this reflect a lack of supply? The wording should be changed to clarify the point.

7. On page 15, in the section “availability,” the authors state “these policymakers and providers foresee no adverse effect of the use of ECPs on STIs.” This point conflicts with several of the earlier quotes in the paper which suggest several people interviewed had concerns that increasing ECP access would lead to more STIs. Please clarify.

8. In the sentence on page 6, the authors should change their wording to: “….encouraging approval of a dedicated ECP product by the Lao Food and Drug Administration”

9. On page 16, the authors should reword their sentence: “providers cannot be relied upon to give accurate and consistent advice to potential clients.”

10. There are a number of small problems with English in the paper:
   a. Page 4 “Only a few methods were routinely practiced…” “Practiced” should be changed to “offered”
   b. Page 5 “Emergency contraceptives are used to prevented” the sentence should say “prevent”
   c. Page 6 change wording to: “The study was carried out in Vientiane, the capital city of the Lao PDR.”
   d. Page 6 change wording to: “the total population of Lao PDR is 5.6 million. The country is divided into 17 provinces.”
   e. Page 8 change wording to: “The interviews were carried out face to face with the key informants.” Also, add “a” before “tape recorder.”
   f. There is a typo on page 9 where the authors report “nearly two-thirds had at least “nice” years of working experience.
   g. On page 17, the sentence should be changed to:“ In Italy, where people are also poorly informed on the available methods..”

Discretionary Revisions

1. If oral contraceptive pills are sold over the counter, educational campaigns could seek to teach women how to take regular combined pills as ECPs until a dedicated ECP product becomes available. This strategy has been used in other countries such as Mexico and may be relevant to Lao PDR. The authors may want to add this point to their recommendations section.

2. On page 14, the authors should consider changing their wording from “better, more sustainable methods” to “more effective, ongoing methods”

3. The long quote on page 16 is difficult to follow and some of the English is confusing. I suggest editing it down.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.