

There's a better way to prevent teen pregnancies

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(Photo: Spike Mafford / Getty Images)

Did you know that there is a contraceptive that, over the long term, is 20 times more effective than the birth control pill?

May is officially National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, so this is a great time to learn more about this public health priority. The U.S. has the highest rate of any wealthy country, and in Rochester it is even higher than the national average. Teen pregnancy is a major risk factor for infant mortality and other bad health outcomes. In addition, it is the biggest reason for girls to drop out of high school.

Fortunately, multiple organizations here are already doing a lot to prevent teen pregnancy through education, youth development programs, social marketing and other efforts. One area where we could do more is in making sure that people receive correct information about the most effective type

of non-permanent birth control: LARC. LARC stands for long-acting reversible contraception. It's also been called "whoops proof" or "low maintenance" birth control, because it lasts for years. LARC, which consist of intrauterine devices and the contraceptive implant, is not just very effective, but also is very safe.

The large Contraceptive CHOICE project in St. Louis showed that when offered all contraceptive options, most women - including adolescents - chose LARC. They also found that racial disparities in unintended pregnancy disappeared, and that women who selected LARC were happier with their choice, and stuck with it longer than those who used other methods. LARC is recommended as first line contraception for sexually active teens by the American Academy Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. The CDC has declared that teen pregnancy is a "winnable battle" and recommends LARC as one of the strategies for winning.

For the past two years, the URMC's LARC Initiative (a community health project supported by a grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation) has been conducting talks for adults who work with adolescents. Along with sandwiches, we provide scientifically accurate information about LARC. To date, we have spoken to more than 700 people, including physicians, nurses, teachers, counselors, social service providers, etc. Please contact us (larc.urmc.edu) if you would like a LARC talk for your organization.

Every week, it seems, the *Democrat & Chronicle* features stories about poverty, racial disparities, or school failure in Rochester. There is no magic bullet that can solve all these problems in one shot, but winning the battle against teen pregnancy would be one important step in the right direction.

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