Alameda County
Health Care for the Homeless
Alameda County
Health Care Services Agency

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STANDING ORDER FOR PROGESTIN-ONLY PILLS (POPs)

Purpose: The purpose of this order is to supplement current policy and procedures by providing guidance to Registered Nurses to identify individuals who would benefit from the use progestin-only oral contraceptives to prevent unintended pregnancy.

Background: Progestin-only pills (POPs) are an oral contraceptive option for individuals who cannot or prefer not to use estrogen containing contraception. Most women of reproductive age can take progestin-only oral contraceptives. Norethindrone POPs work by thickening the cervical mucus to prevent sperm migration, suppressing ovulation, lowering the peaks of FSH and LH, slowing the movement of eggs through the fallopian tubes, and thinning the endometrium. The efficacy of POPs may be lower than that with other hormonal contraceptives and needs to be taken daily, ideally at the same time every day, for maximum efficacy. POPs are best for clients with high medication adherence rates. Fertility returns rapidly upon discontinuation.

Scope/Coverage: Under these standing orders, the following types of health care personnel are authorized to administer this treatment:

- Registered Nurses

Procedure:

- Obtain medical including gynecologic history and STI risk assessment. Refer to STI protocol if client requires presumptive treatment or testing for sexually transmitted infection.
- Discuss history of other contraceptive uses, past and present with client. Present all options available for contraception considering client preferences and medical history
- Obtain current medication list
- Physical exam or laboratory tests are not necessary before beginning POPs.
- Obtain date of last menstrual cycle, if known.
- Rule out current pregnancy, either by LMP date or pregnancy test.
- **Patient Education:**
    - The most common side effect associated with POPs is unscheduled bleeding/changes in the menstrual cycle. Clients should be counseled that the occurrence of unscheduled bleeding does not indicate that the contraceptive method should be discontinued.
    - Other common side effects include increased prevalence of follicular ovarian cysts, acne flares, and mood changes.
    - The use of POPs does not prevent the transmission of Sexually Transmitted Infection.
    - It is essential that the norethindrone POP be taken at the same time each day to maximize efficacy.
        - If a pill is missed by more than three hours it is advised to use additional contraception (condoms or abstinence from sex) for 48 hours after the late dose.
        - Those with a delayed or missed pill should resume taking POPs as soon as possible, even if this means that two pills are taken on the same day.
        - Back up contraception can be stopped after pills are taken at the correct time for two consecutive days.

Plan

- There are several start options for Progestin-only contraceptive pills:
  - Start pills on first day of menses. This method does not require a backup contraceptive.
  - Any day start: back up contraception is needed for seven additional days.
- Supply client with norethindrone 0.35 mg, with instructions to take one pill by mouth every day, at the same time every day.
- Providing a one-year supply of POPs enhances continuation rates.
- Attempt follow up with client in one month to assess tolerance to medication, side effects, and satisfaction with contraceptive method.

Contraindications: contraindications to POPs include current pregnancy (pregnancies conceived in women taking POPs have not been associated with adverse effects), known or suspected breast cancer, undiagnosed abnormal uterine bleeding, and liver disease.

References: UpToDate Patient Education: Hormonal Methods of Birth Control: Beyond the Basics.

These orders shall remain in effect for all patients receiving medical care from Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless until rescinded.

DocuSigned by:
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7/25/2023

Medical Director

Date

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Approved By: Dr. Kathleen Clanon, Medical Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency