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Contact: Cindy Fox Aisen
cfa3@georgetown.edu
202-687-1392

Mind the Gap: Responding to the International Funding Crisis in Family Planning

Washington, DC. Experts forecast that by 2015 a gap as large as \$(US) 210 million will exist between the cost of meeting family planning needs worldwide and funding availability. Writing in the current issue of *the Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*, Jay Gribble, Sc.D., formerly of Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health and now with The Futures Group International, says that given the unlikelihood of increasing donor levels and the certainty of growing need, the development and introduction of effective, low-cost methods of effective family planning methods appear to be one of the best solutions for both donor and recipient nations.

Dr. Gribble reports that the Standard Days Method™, which is inexpensive, easy to use and 95% effective in preventing pregnancy, provides a cost-effective answer to the problem. Multinational studies conducted by Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health, which developed the method, have found that the ease of correct use and very low cost make the Standard Days Method attractive even in areas which traditionally have had low levels of contraceptive use.

The Standard Days Method identifies a fixed fertile window in the menstrual cycle and helps users to be aware of the days when pregnancy can occur. Users of this natural family planning method can rely on CycleBeads™ (known as Collar del Ciclo™ in Spanish and Collier du Cycle™ in French), a color-coded set of beads, to help identify fertile and non-fertile days and monitor cycle length. Each bead represents a day of the cycle. A rubber ring is moved each day to the next bead to track the cycle. On brown bead days the risk of pregnancy is low; on glow-in-the-dark white bead days the chance of pregnancy is high.

“The warning to the international reproductive health community is clear,” concludes Dr. Gribble. “The growing donor gap could have some significant negative consequences. However, it also offers an opportunity to reassess policies for family planning programs, including the availability of effective low-cost methods such as the Standard Days Method.” The “Mind the Gap” study was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Standard Days Method and CycleBeads are now available in more than 20 developing countries around the world. [See sidebar] “We are pleased by the very positive response to this method by ministries of health and nongovernmental organizations as well as by women and men who want to use it. We’re finding that the Standard Days Method and CycleBeads appeal to first-time family planning users and to people who have been

dissatisfied with other methods,” said Victoria Jennings, Ph.D., Director of Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health.

“And the Standard Days Method and CycleBeads are gaining popularity in the United States and other developed countries among women who want a reliable, non-invasive, non-hormonal method of family planning,” adds Dr. Jennings. “They are also appealing from a cost perspective. Hormonal contraceptive methods such as the pill, the patch and the ring can cost as much as \$350 to \$450 a year in the US. CycleBeads, which can last indefinitely, are a very small fraction of that cost.” A growing number of healthcare providers, family planning clinics and state health departments in the U.S. provide the Standard Days Method and use CycleBeads to help women understand their cycles.

Women can find more information or purchase CycleBeads online at www.cyclebeads.com. Information for providers and others interested in bulk purchases can be found at www.cyclebeads.com/providers/.

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B-roll including CycleBeads users in Bolivia, Peru, Philippines, and the U.S. is available upon request. Photos of users from most countries in which the Institute for Reproductive Health has programs are available electronically.

Jay Gribble, Sc.D. and Victoria Jennings, Ph.D. are available for interviews in English or Spanish. French-speaking experts are also available. Arrangements can be made to interview program directors and Standard Days Method users in various countries [see sidebar].

The Institute for Reproductive Health is dedicated to helping women and men make informed choices about family planning and providing them with simple, effective, and natural options. As part of Georgetown University's School of Medicine, the Institute is working to advance the base of scientific knowledge on reproductive physiology. This knowledge is used to develop and test simple, new natural family planning methods, as well as to determine best practices for providing these methods and for building service delivery strategies. More information about the Institute for Reproductive Health can be found at www.irh.org