

No shelf life for emergency contraception

The Voice, Oct. 26, 2000 pg.1

Fifty-six percent of respondents in an on-line poll felt that emergency contraception (commonly known by its old name -- the morning-after pill) should be available over the counter at pharmacies in B.C. The poll was conducted by the Vancouver Sun last week in the light of premier Ujjal Donanji's recent comments that he hopes emergency contraception will be available over the counter soon.

At present, emergency contraception is available at pharmacies only with a doctor's prescription.

But it is available without a prescription from local health clinics, including Langara Student Health Services.

The need for a prescription is seen by health service providers as a negative factor in the effectiveness of emergency contraception because it should be used within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse.

"We want women to take it as soon as possible," says Janice Swan, the nurse at Student Health Services. "After the 72 hours, the statistics for effectiveness really go down."

Those statistics show that of 100 women who use emergency contraception within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, only 2 will remain pregnant.

Nurses at clinics have been given the authority to provide emergency contraception without a doctor's intervention because the treatment is "not risky," said Swan.

The small packet dispensed by Health Services contains four Ovral pills, and two tablets of Gravol. The Gravol is provided to combat

nausea, which is the most common side effect of the large dose of hormones in the Ovral pills. Each Ovral pill contains 50 milligrams of estrogen.

According to Swan, emergency contraception is finally coming out of its veil of secrecy.

"Now they ask for it in the lobby," she said.

Emergency contraception is available free of charge for all Langara students at Health Services.