What is Nexplanon®?

Nexplanon® [Schering-Plough Limited/Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited (MSD), UK] is a progestogen-only subdermal implant that has now replaced the contraceptive implant, Implanon®. Nexplanon and Implanon are bioequivalent (i.e. they both contain 68 mg etonogestrel and they have the same release rate and 3-year duration of action). The main differences are that Nexplanon is radio-opaque and has a different application device and insertion technique.

How is the applicator different?

The applicator (Figure 1) has been modified to reduce the risk of inadvertent non-insertion or deep insertion and to facilitate one-handed insertion. A safety device prevents removal of the clear plastic needle cover if there is no implant in the applicator. The applicator has been designed in such a way that there is a maximal depth and length to which the implant can be inserted. When the implant is released fully (by pulling the purple slider all the way back until it stops) the needle is retracted completely into the body of the applicator, thus reducing the risk of needle-stick injury.

Does Faculty guidance on progestogen-only implants apply to Nexplanon?

Yes. As Implanon and Nexplanon have been shown to be bioequivalent there are no differences in their safety profile. UK Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use of progestogen-only implants will also apply to Nexplanon. The only change from current Faculty guidance on Progestogen-only Implants is in relation to recommendations on insertion and methods of location.

How do the insertion and removal techniques differ?

The recommended site of insertion is the same as that currently recommended for Implanon (i.e. 8–10 cm above the medial epicondyle of the humerus). The main differences are that the manufacturer now recommends that the health professional sits to perform the insertion procedure and that the arm should be marked both at the planned insertion site and 6–8 cm above the insertion site in order to guide the direction of insertion. The technique for removal of Nexplanon is no different from that for Implanon.

How can non-palpable Nexplanon implants be located?

Barium sulphate has been added to Nexplanon to make it radio-opaque. This means that it can be seen on X-ray and computed tomography (CT) scan in addition to high-frequency linear array ultrasound (US) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Therefore, if linear array US is not available, X-ray can be used to confirm the presence of a non-palpable Nexplanon. At the time of removal, however, linear array US remains the recommended imaging technique for locating a non-palpable or deep implant.

Can Implanon still be given to women requesting an implant?

Nexplanon is now available in the UK. Existing Implanon stocks can be used if the implant is still within its expiry date and the health professional has been trained in Implanon insertion.
What should women requesting replacement of Implanon be told?

Women should be informed that Implanon and Nexplanon are virtually the same in terms of the hormone they contain, the dose, efficacy, side effects and duration of action. The only differences are that the implant and insertion device have been improved to make Nexplanon visible on X-ray and easier to insert.

What training will be required for health professionals to fit Nexplanon?

The requirements for certification and recertification for the Letter of Competence in Subdermal Implant Techniques (LoC SDI) are changing as from 1 January 2011. Detailed information can be found using the following link: http://www.fsrh.org/admin/uploads/LoCIUTSDIrevisions.pdf.

New LoC SDI requirements

- Theory – completion of relevant module of e-SRH
- Evidence of current basic life support and anaphylaxis training will be required
- Model training – may be carried from Course of 5, or delivered by trainer
- Recertification:
  - e-SRH module on SDI must be completed within 2 years of recertification
  - Six (6) procedures, at least one (1) insertion and one (1) removal (as before) in 12 months

Current holders of the LoC SDI are recommended to undertake additional training before undertaking Nexplanon insertion in a woman. The Faculty recommends practical (model arm) experience in addition to theoretical training. Theoretical training, FAQs and the Summary of Product Characteristics can be accessed through the manufacturer's training website (http://www.nexplanontraining.co.uk/).

Trainers in implant insertion should undergo Nexplanon training before training other health professionals to insert Nexplanon. Training programmes should be modified to incorporate the changes to the manufacturer's and Faculty's recommendations.

Further information on certification, training and resources is available on the above links to the Faculty website and manufacturer’s training website.

References