

Discussing Birth-Control Options

JM is a 19 year old woman with a mild to moderate intellectual disability and spina bifida. She uses a wheelchair, speaks and is very chatty. However, she has significant comprehension problems that are often masked by her verbal and social skills. She also has a short attention span and memory problems.

During a meeting with her doctor, JM's mother leaves the room to go to the washroom and JM informs doctor that she wants to speak to her alone. JM's mother comes back into the room and doctor asks for time to speak to JM alone. JM tells the doctor that she has a boyfriend and is sexually active and wants to start the pill. The doctor explains a few options, risks and benefits and then asks a few open-ended questions to see if JM understands. JM is nervous and answers 'yes' to all the questions that are open-ended and does not seem to be listening or understanding.

The doctor arranges a follow-up meeting with JM with the following supports:

- A private appointment to find out if JM wants a trusted person, other than her mother to attend or if she wants a social worker or a therapist to be present.
- Extra appointment time and multiple appointments to discuss issues.
- Learning about JM's communication needs as well as her perspective, life experiences, and relationships.
- Facilitating JM's comprehension by using everyday language; chunking information into manageable bits; pausing after sentences to allow for processing time; writing key words or showing pictures; using diagrams or dolls; repeating information; using a word chart to support comprehension, with phrases such as I don't understand, Please repeat that, Tell me more about that, what do you mean; asking questions in different ways to check understanding; Using a Talk Back technique such as "Tell me what I said"
- Giving written information in plain language and offering assistance with reading and understanding.
- Facilitating JM's memory by using memory aids, such as note-taking, journals and calendars