Health services can be cool: partnership with adolescents in primary care

Milne and Chesson report that teenage sexual health in England and Wales is deteriorating, with a rise in both teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. In May 2000, we conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate sexual lifestyles and attitudes in 125 15- to 16-year-olds attending an inner London comprehensive school.

The response rate was 78% (98/125). Forty-four percent of responders had experienced sexual intercourse, with the mean age for first sexual intercourse being 14 (range 8–16 years). We found that 32% of teenagers questioned felt they had had intercourse too early. Forty-three percent of teenagers were unable to talk to their GP about their sexual health, with the main barrier being embarrassment and difficulty talking to their GP. Only 27% had concerns over confidentiality. Thirty-three teenagers made further comments at the end of the questionnaire. A common theme was the availability of family planning clinics, with many respondents saying that clinics should be open more often and that contraception should be more widely available.

Most 15- to 16-year-olds are registered with a GP. Only 7% of the respondents said that they did not have a GP. Primary care should therefore be a readily available source of sexual health advice. However, as in Milne and Chesson’s report, about half the sample were worried about talking to their GP about their sexual health. We agree that primary care needs to work to establish greater partnership with adolescents and to identify strategies to improve teenagers’ awareness of and access to services.

References