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HEADLINE: Injectus interruptus: Birth control for men is doomed to fail, writes Laura Wershler

Memo to Big Pharma: Save your money. If you think the male birth control pill is going to be a big seller, think again.

Memo to women everywhere: Curb your enthusiasm. If you think it's time men took more responsibility, you're right -- but the Pill for Bill is not going to be it.

** Reports this week that a male contraceptive prevented pregnancy in 55 couples who used it for one year have many thinking the time has come for men to take "greater responsibility for contraception in a convenient and effective way."

Let's get real. Does anybody truly believe that many men will submit to quarterly injections of the female hormone progestin to inhibit spermatogenesis, in tandem with an implant under the skin that will replace the testosterone the poor guy's body will no longer produce?

According to a story from the London Telegraph, because the treatment is invasive, it is likely to be used only by men in long-term relationships. Read it and weep, gals, because this is the wicked truth. It's OK for women of any age or relationship status to ingest birth control pills or receive the Depo-Provera injection that completely shuts down their reproductive systems, but men would never do the same. It is already postulated that only men in committed relationships are likely to submit to invasive hormonal contraception. That would be supportive husbands and partners of the best kind.

And let's not be so quick to assume this injection/implant thing for men does no harm. The injection prevents a man's body from producing both sperm and testosterone. The implant replaces testosterone to prevent tiredness and loss of libido. But, gee, do you think the synthetic testosterone works as well as the real thing?

One year, 55 men, no pregnancies, does not a safe drug make.

It could be years before the contraceptive is available. Clinical trials involving much larger numbers of men for longer periods of time will have to occur.

If early research on the pill for women is any predictor, pharmaceutical companies will be looking to the developing world for eager or unwitting subjects. I can't imagine thousands of men lining up in the western world to participate.

Men should be most concerned about the long-term effects. There are too many unanswered questions. Which begs the question: is it worth the time and expense to answer any of them when men may never be willing to subjugate their masculinity to prevent conception if it threatens in any way their future virility, their sex drive or their career success?

And that brings us to another fact of contraceptive use -- failure to comply. Many women cease

the use of hormonal birth control because they experience or perceive side effects. Drug companies keep offering fresh approaches to motivate our compliance. Quarterly injections for those who can't remember to take a pill every day, patches you change once a week, acne-curing pills, tri-phasal pills, progestin-only pills and emergency contraceptive pills for when we fail to comply.

The latest is a pill that gives women a "pseudo period" once every season instead of once a month.

At the first sign of fatigue, low libido or reduced work performance, I suspect all those supportive husbands and partners would be failing to comply. There will not be a list of alternatives in the drug "pipeline" waiting to be tried.

It'll be game over and the drug companies who were stupid enough in the first place to waste their money on "the shot" for men will be sorry they failed to think it through beforehand. It is not a marketing fait accompli and big pharma probably already knows this.

Here's one more thing to think about. There once was an implant contraceptive for women called Norplant. You could not fail to comply unless your doctor removed it. It caused all sorts of physiological and sociological problems. In some places in the U.S., its use was enforced by court order on poor women whom society believed should not be procreating. A couple of years ago, Norplant was taken off the market without fanfare. It is not missed.

Today, we say men in long-term relationships will be most likely to use this male contraceptive. Tomorrow, we might insist that ne'er-do-wells who father children they cannot or will not support should be ordered to take it to protect society.

As a veteran sexual and reproductive rights activist, I'm the first to acknowledge men have not taken their fair share of responsibility in preventing unplanned pregnancies or, just as seriously, sexually transmitted infections. But there is a lot most people don't know about the good, the bad and the ugly of hormonal birth control use by women.

To think the answer for our reproductive woes and challenges lies in hormonal contraception for men is misguided at best.

My advice to men of all ages and relationship status is to more knowingly share the burden with your partners. Use condoms more often, more proactively and with more enthusiasm. Understand and respect the sacrifice women have been making for half a century by taking hormonal concoctions that inhibit their bodies' production of their hormone of desire, estrogen. And if they want to stop, support them.

The male birth control injection is a non-starter. And not just because most men are big wimps when it comes to their sexual health and vigour. It is just not the right option to pursue.

Laura Wershler is a Calgary sexual and reproductive health advocate, writer and speaker.