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Abstract

Ethical Perspectives on Male Contraceptive Development and Delivery

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In the long pursuit of reproductive justice, the global community has acknowledged that rights to reproductive health are universal, inalienable, and available to both men and women. These rights encompass the right to decide the number, timing, and spacing of childbearing, to information, and to services. Nevertheless, the perspectives and needs of men have largely been absent from the development of new technologies, policy discussions, programmatic action, and research and evaluation.

Research ethics bodies provide oversight of key areas of respect, beneficence, and justice. It also ensures the protection of the well-being and interest of research participants and future users. Ethical practice is the responsibility of all duty holders in product development as well as product delivery. IRBs focus more on the human research phases of drug development, but their engagement is relevant across the later introduction and delivery continuum.

The challenges with new male contraception from an ethics perspective include the more complex rules for informed consent and diverse outcomes for men and women; unclear standards for assessing risks among couples, their nature, strength, and distribution; the increased demands for couple communication around adherence, safety, and unplanned pregnancy; the time lags for achieve efficacy and recover; and justice in the economic dimensions of access.

Given the history of ethical violations associated with new technologies, as duty holders, we need to be vigilant that rights and interests of research participants and potential users are protected. Thus, we have long term obligations for vigilance. Mitigations are possible but risks and interests can be longer term and never fully addressed. Getting this balance right over time is critically important both for our product development enterprise and the protections for the individuals and communities we seek to benefit