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Contraceptive agents

## Emergency contraception sales fall by more than 50% as pandemic causes 'disruption' to sexual health services

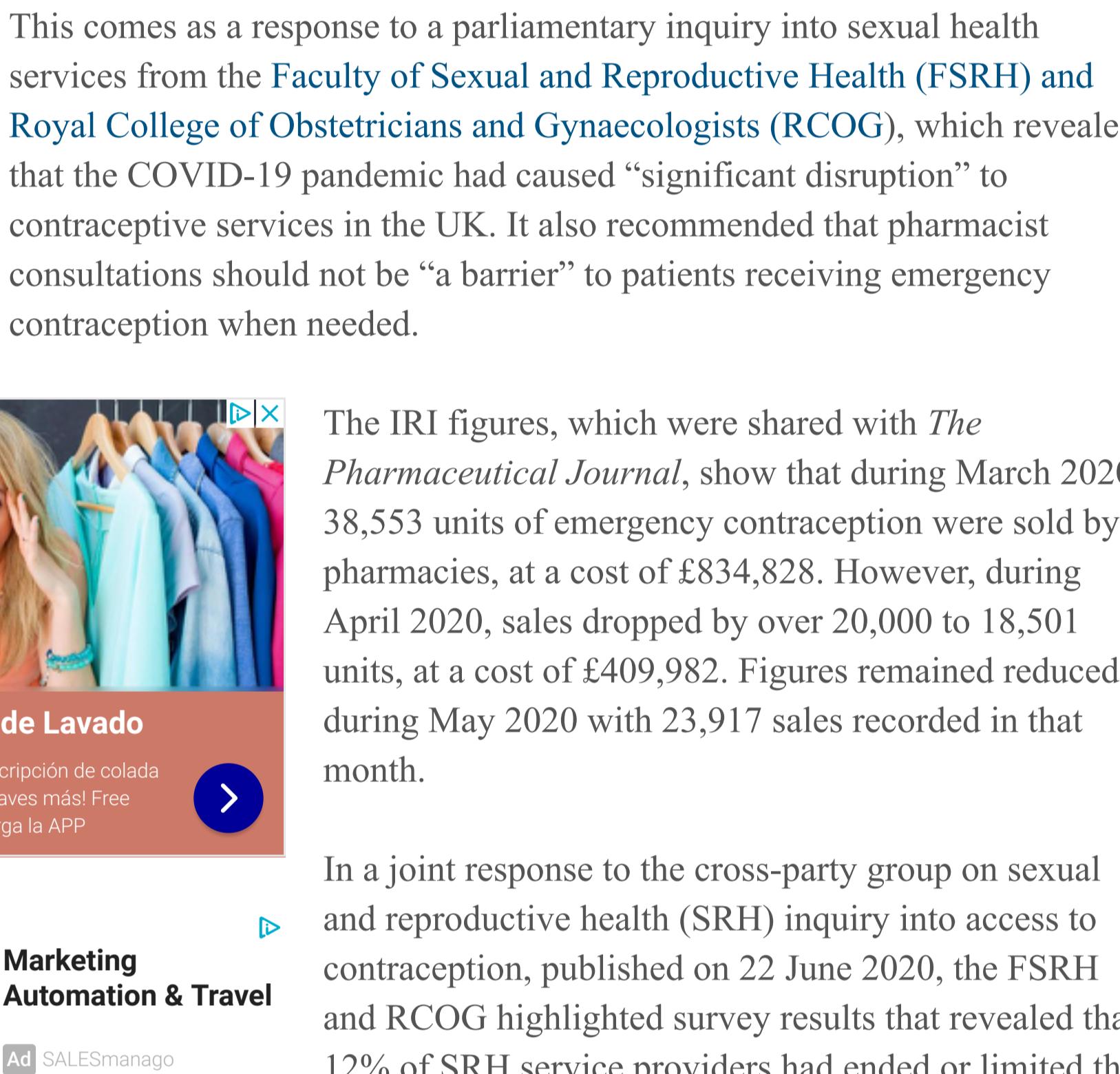
*The Pharmaceutical Journal* | 29 JUN 2020 | By Julia Robinson

Morning after pill sales fell by more than 20,000 units between March and April 2020, says retail data provider IRI.

### Open access article

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has made this article free to access in order to help healthcare professionals stay informed about an issue of national importance.

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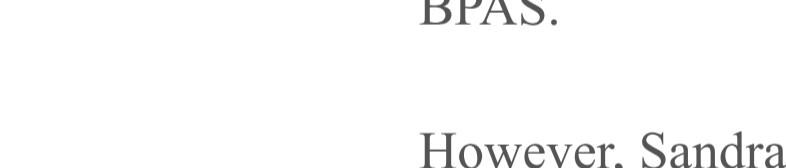


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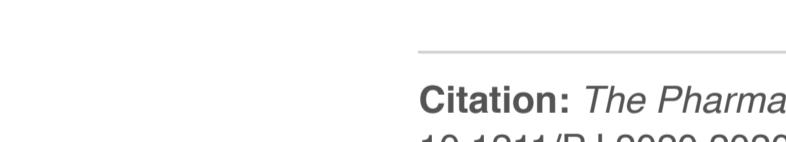
A parliamentary enquiry revealed the COVID-19 pandemic had caused "significant disruption" to contraceptive services in the UK

Sales of the morning after pill dropped by more than 50% between March 2020 and April 2020, according to retail data provider IRI.

This comes as a response to a parliamentary inquiry into sexual health services from the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH) and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), which revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused "significant disruption" to contraceptive services in the UK. It also recommended that pharmacist consultations should not be "a barrier" to patients receiving emergency contraception when needed.



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The IRI figures, which were shared with *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, show that during March 2020, 38,553 units of emergency contraception were sold by pharmacies, at a cost of £834,828. However, during April 2020, sales dropped by over 20,000 to 18,501 units, at a cost of £409,982. Figures remained reduced during May 2020 with 23,917 sales recorded in that month.

In a joint response to the cross-party group on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) inquiry into access to contraception, published on 22 June 2020, the FSRH and RCOG highlighted survey results that revealed that 12% of SRH service providers had ended or limited the provision of emergency oral contraception during the pandemic.

The FSRH and RCOG said "all individuals" should have access to free emergency contraception "at time and place of need".

"Though consultations with pharmacists are recommended and best practice, a consultation should not be a barrier to receiving emergency contraception," the response said.

Separately, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has called for emergency hormonal contraception to be reclassified as a general sales list medication so that it can be sold without the need for a consultation.

"This would ensure women could buy the medication directly from the shelf from pharmacies and other locations where medicines are sold without the need for a face-to-face consultation with a pharmacist, which may be impossible to conduct while also observing social-distancing measures," said Katherine O'Brien, associate director of communications and campaigns at BPAS.

However, Sandra Gidley, president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said that having a discussion with a pharmacist was a "key part" of emergency contraception provision.

"A consultation supports a woman to consider her future use of contraception, her risk of having a sexually transmitted infection and help with any other sexual health questions she may have."

"The ongoing requirement for a consultation and the classification of emergency contraception as a P medicine is a matter for the medicines regulator and marketing authorisation holders."

**Citation:** *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, PJ June 2020 online, online | DOI: 10.1211/PJ.2020.20208118

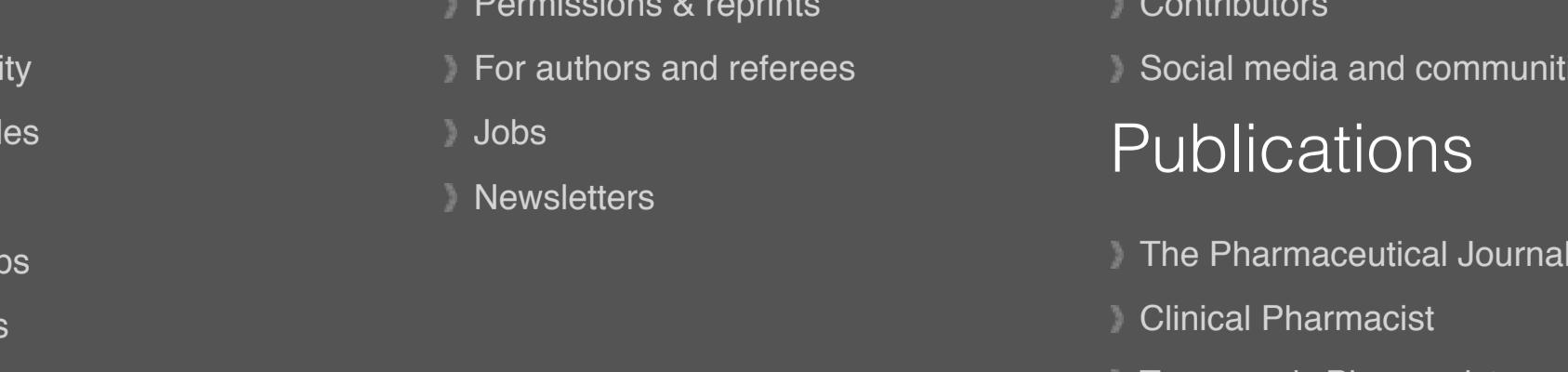
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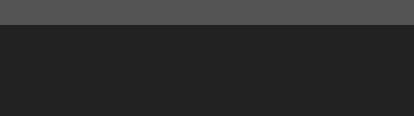
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