

NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF
WOMEN'S &
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
Medical Sciences Division



AIMday in Women's Health

TUESDAY 22ND MARCH 2022

ST ANNE'S COLLEGE, OXFORD



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



Welcome

“ Our AIMday was a huge milestone event in championing women's and reproductive health research. External companies each submitted a question that would benefit from academic input and insight which formed a 1-hour workshop hosted by the company. Here follows a collection of blogs by our early career researchers and students from the University of Oxford, who shared their thoughts from the fruitful discussions on the day. We hope it encourages continued engagement between academics and industry.



Professor Krina Zondervan
Head of Department, Professor of Reproductive &
Genomic Epidemiology, Co-Director, Oxford
Endometriosis CaRe centre

ON THE BALL

OCON Healthcare strives to deliver advancements in intrauterine ball technology to developing countries and globally

At Oxford University's AIMDay in Women's Health 2022, OCON Healthcare made waves during their discussion of their novel intrauterine ball (IUB) technology and addressed its potential application to address abnormal uterine bleeding in the developing world. The Israeli-based, fem-powered research and development company, whose goal is to "revolutionize women's health and improve quality of life" impressed me with their unique way of helping those not only seeking contraception, but also those needing more diverse and accessible treatments for abnormal uterine bleeding as well as prevalent conditions such as endometriosis and fibroids. The talk, held by Ms. Daniela Schardinger, the VP of Marketing and Medical Affairs for OCON, and moderated by Oxford's Dr Anita Makins, elucidated on the diverse range of products developed by OCON, and centring around their unique ball technology, in which devices are ball-shaped to better integrate into the uterine environment and prevent injury such as perforation with a three-dimensional spherical design. These 3D devices can also be easily inserted by non-physician medical staff with no capital equipment costs.

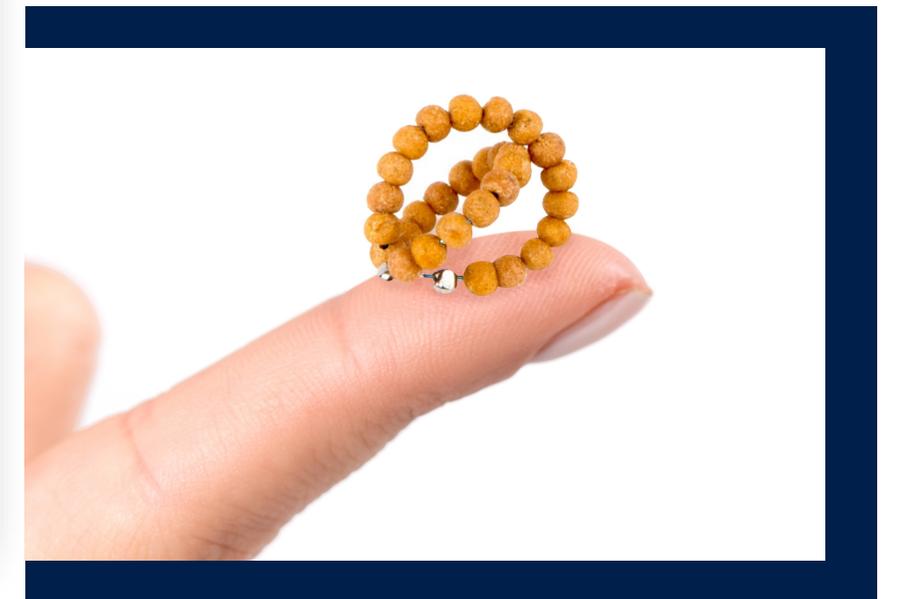
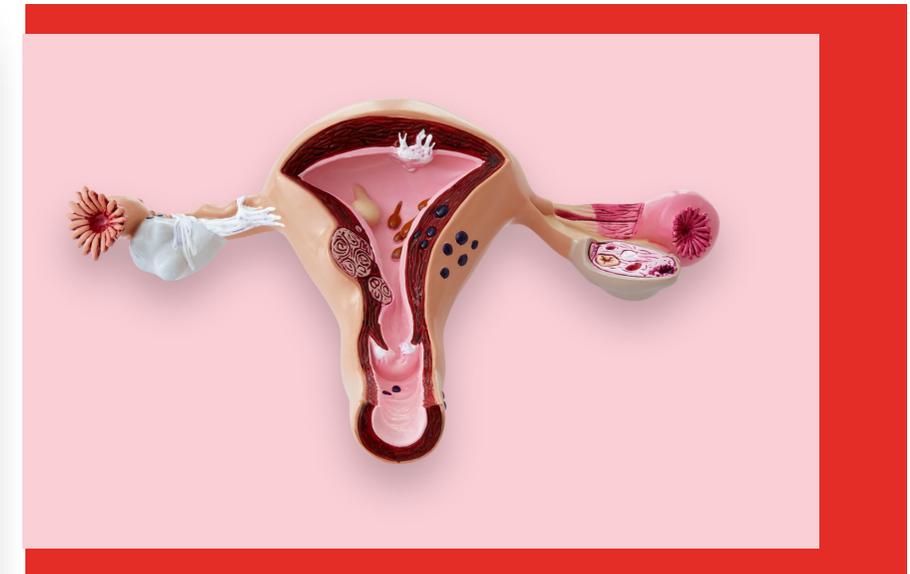
I was shocked to learn that approximately 1 in 4 people with vaginas who are of reproductive age live with abnormal uterine bleeding, and I was unsurprised by the variety of indirect economic impacts this has on life. It was noted that this condition is a common cause of visits to gynaecologists and impacts sex life and mental health. On a more clinical note, abnormal uterine bleeding can result in anaemia and iron deficiency due to the excessive loss of blood. This was concerning to hear, as even without abnormal bleeds, 1 in 3 people who menstruate are anaemic, and in the developing world, this condition affects more than 1 in 2 people.

Company: **OCON Healthcare**
Chair: **Anita Makins**



OCON led the talk by first introducing their platform technology which has been validated through the company's inaugural product, the copper IUD "Ballerine", which has over 120,000 worldwide users. This product was so well-tolerated that OCON expanded their ball technology to develop the IUB "SEAD" (Spherical Endometrial Ablation Device), which can be used for abnormal uterine bleeding and heavy menstrual bleeding by performing a non-invasive endometrial ablation - the removal of the endometrial lining of the uterus, in 20 minutes using a compound called silver nitrate. This compound is compacted in beads along the IUB frame that melt and coat the uterine lining. This is a simple in-office procedure. OCON also claimed that they are expanding their offerings by developing a slow-release drug delivery IUB to utilize for contraception, fibroids and endometriosis indications with a local target (the first being levonorgestrel-based), intending to prevent the potential systemic side-effects associated with various contraceptives and treatments taken orally to women's issues.

The main goal of OCON's workshop was how to create impact in the developing world. I felt that a variety of important issues were brought up by the attending academics and students, the biggest of which was affordability, access and education. In many countries, women are sent to have hysterectomies or undergo current deliberating global endometrial ablation therapies as a common treatment for abnormal uterine bleeding, which are not only costly but can cause further complications, like any surgical intervention. For women seeking care in developing countries, modern options are often not available due to high cost, therefore a low price strategy would need to be adapted in order to make these treatments more affordable. One attendee brought up another valuable discussion point using their own experience of patient healthcare views in Central Asia, noting that there is a common perception that treatments from the "West" should not be accessible, creating patient resistance to using devices such as an IUD. Additionally, they mentioned that access to care varies in different locations and is not uniform between patients. Although OCON currently has operations in Africa, and more recently in Latin America and soon in China, their take-up data is primarily from the European market, and they note the importance of acquiring adoption data in the areas in which they have entered for further expansion. OCON's SEAD treatment, currently in Phase IIb studies, looks to be a promising more cost-effective solution especially for women in LMIC countries suffering from menstrual disorders with a lack of accessible solutions, with the product's ease of use in-any-office-setting eliminating the need for hospitalization or anesthesia. This technology also takes away the need for expensive capital equipment lowering the burden of costs associated with these treatments. The company's earlier research in Eastern Europe has demonstrated the urgent need for more modern, less invasive solutions especially in low resource settings, where women are often pushed towards hysterectomies - the removal of the uterus - due to lack of affordable alternatives. This was demonstrated by the high demand and quick recruitment of its Phase II(a) study for the novel, non-invasive SEAD treatment.





Attendees urged OCON to consider the future effects on people who utilize such products but are not done with their family planning, or have a risk of developing cancer. The long term needs are to be further investigated; Daniela admits.

Why this research is so important was what stayed with me the most. Women's health funding is difficult to score, but this research affects over half of the world's population! OCON is hoping that things can change with more conversations like those at Oxford University's AIMDay, not only for those utilizing products like the IUD and IUB in HICs but also in LICs too, to provide equal health outcomes for all – a sentiment which I, as a reproductive health student, share wholeheartedly.

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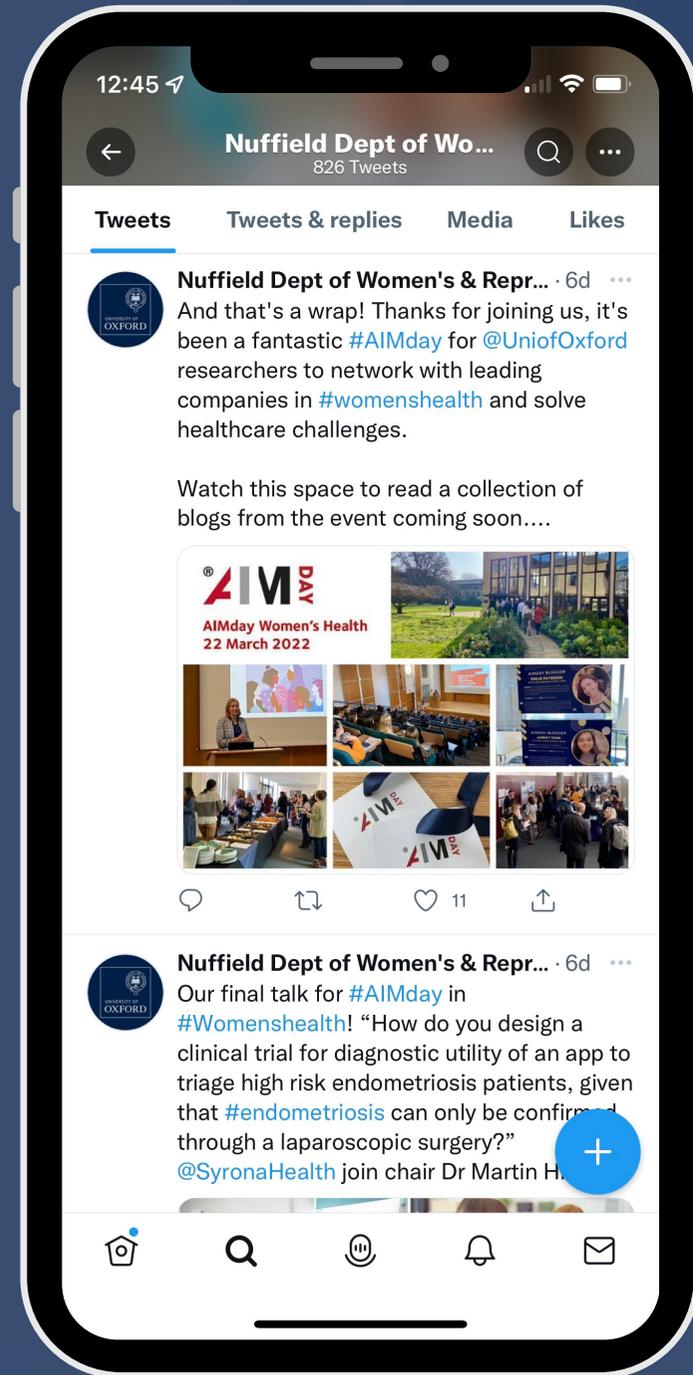
Blogger Bio

I am passionate about equity in global health outcomes and look forward to exploring the complex landscape of reproductive health over the year.



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