

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

50 years from the encyclical letter “Humanae vitae”

HOT TOPICS SESSION

ON-LINE TEACHING TO USERS AND ON-LINE EXPERT TRAINING

1.- NFP TEACHING IN RENAFER

From its beginning in 1990, teaching NFP to users and training experts has been one of the fundamental activities of RENAFER.

The first users' courses were held in the private consultation of a Medical Doctor. (M. Rutllant) who had been personally accredited for that purpose, by Drs. J. and E. Billings. Some time after, a small group of teachers instructed by Dra. Rutllant, constituted the Group for the Study of Natural Methods and established the first teaching protocol for users.

Teaching women how to fill in the charts and following them was a fundamental and practical part of the course. Nevertheless, before arriving at this point, they were introduced into a theoretical content which included the anthropological and biological basis that support NFP and that allows them to recognize their cyclic fertility.

In 1990 RENAFER was constituted as a nation-wide association. Health professionals of the different autonomic communities became members.

Understanding the need for users to dispose of a small guide with the basic notions on NFP that every user should know, in 2000 we published the *Basic Manual of NFP*, with the collaboration of different members among the teachers of RENAFER.

The experts in NFP in every Spanish town where RENAFER is present, structure the teaching for users following their specific characteristics and needs. In Barcelona, where the social site stands, courses in presence are held 3 times a year in the 1st, 2nd and 4th terms.

Training courses for monitors and experts were organized once a year, until 2015, in the social site of RENAFER, whenever there was a sufficient demand. It was an intensive course to which people from all the Spanish communities assisted. In various occasions courses for Portuguese professionals were also organized. The alumni were required to come back to Barcelona, after having studied and put into practice the teachings of the course, in order to submit themselves to an exam to obtain the title of expert.

In the past year we have elaborated a *Consulter Text for experts in NFP. Teacher's Manual*, which is used as a guide for their training and which contains the basic knowledge they must achieve.

2.-NEEDS THAT CAUSED THE ON- LINE TEACHING

After an experience of more than 30 years teaching users and training experts in presence, we realised the need of starting an on-line teaching due, to the different petitions of both couples and health professionals of towns far from Barcelona, and even from other countries. This type of teaching would

avoid them travelling, and so diminish the cost of their training and also would facilitate the incorporations in the field of NFP. It would also make easier the personal and repeated consultations of those who already are involved in it. Finally it would solve the urgency of those who cannot wait for another course due to a near marriage, or for any other urgent situation.

With this objective in mind, in 2013 we started a pilot program for users, and later on in 2015 another one for the training of experts.

The on-line teaching was started with the acquired experience in the counselling of couples who had already done the course in presence and that after some time, due to changes in their fertile life (post-partum, pre-menopause...) got in touch again with us to solve some questions or to refresh their knowledge in this matter. This did not always occur from nearby places, and it obliged us to adapt in our teaching, the use of ICT. The good results obtained with these new techniques, thrust us to start the on-line teaching protocols for users, and later for expert training.

A- Users' Courses

3.A -OBJECTIVES

The objective of these courses is the preparation of users for the practice of Natural Methods of Family Planning and the adoption of the style of life that defines NFP: self-knowledge, communication, respect, mutual help, faithfulness and esteem for conscientious parenthood.

In relation to these objectives, it is necessary:

- An integral vision of human sexuality
- A basic knowledge about the, biological, psychological and emotional differences between man and woman.
- A knowledge about combined fertility
- That the knowledge acquired by the users on the Natural Methods used in NFP, allow them to choose the most convenient method according to their personal/couple needs.
- That the users be capable, at the end of the course, of interpreting by themselves their charts, without the help of the expert.
- That the learning results in a deeper experience of sexuality in marriage, within the style of life that NFP proposes.

These courses are addressed to couples and other people who want to have a greater knowledge on human fertility.

4.A -CONTENTS

In the presence courses for users held in RENAFER, it is required that both members of the couple participate in order to learn how to adapt the different expressions of their sexuality and to introduce themselves together in the style of life that proposes NFP. When we thought about the methodology of the on-line program, we were afraid that the man would not participate actively in the learning process, that is why we planned specific sections to involve him.

Before beginning the course, we have a first contact, by phone or on-line, for the couple to explain their situation: whether they are married or going to do so, if they want to look for a pregnancy or if they want to avoid it, or if they are single and want to learn more about their fertility. The expert explains the aims of the course, the methodology and other conditions and answers the questions that might be proposed by the pupil.

Once determined the needs of the pupils, we send them the teaching protocol and start with the personal teaching, according to the circumstances of each one.

5.A-METHODOLOGY

The on-line teaching, as well as that in presence, starts with an anthropological content based on the Personalist Anthropology, upon which stands NFP. The correct integration of all the aspects of human sexuality occupies a great part of the teaching. This part of the subject belongs to the first documentation delivery of the course. 15 days after the anthropological chapters, the chapters on biological and physiological basis are sent.

Once the knowledge on the basis of NFP is acquired, we send the chapters on the different methods used now a day. After the course, the couple will choice the method to be used, according to their needs and circumstances.

In order for the couple to register the different indicators of ovulation, we send them adequate charts for every method. At the beginning of the first cycle, the users are informed about the convenience of abstaining from sexual relationships till they observe the change in the mucus symptom and the maintained temperature rise for Symptothermic Method, or during the whole cycle for Billings Method.

Referring to Symptothermic Method, once the changes in the mucus symptom as well as the maintained temperature rise, are observed, the alumni send their chart to the teacher so that he/she may confirm ovulation, check that the observations and registers in the chart are correct and give them the guidelines for the sexual relationships during the rest of the cycle. We advise them to ask any question related with their observations as soon as it comes up, in order to make clear every concept. Once interpreted and corrected the first cycle, we give them the instructions for the next ones.

The users must send the chart together with the corresponding comments for the teacher to confirm that it has been correctly interpreted. This is the best way for them to be autonomous in a few cycles. The delivery of the charts has to be well controlled in order to assure that all the necessary knowledge has been acquired.

Every chart has to be revised; the teacher will correct by mail the mistakes that the users might have committed in the interpretation of the observations, taking special care that they understand perfectly the explanations that have been transmitted.

All observations have to be registered in the chart. We do not accept unfinished charts or badly registered. These charts cannot be interpreted and are sent back to the users with the corresponding comment about the missing indicators.

The particular situation of every user is treated specifically according to her needs. We frequently receive couples in special circumstances such as stress, breastfeeding, post-partum, pre-menopause, post-pill, post-iud...some looking for a new pregnancy others with the urgent need of avoiding it.

Depending on the particular situation of the couple when they start the course, the documentation on anthropology and sexuality is also accompanied by a first information of how making the observations of the fertility indicators and their register in the chart. If breastfeeding is the case, we also send documentation on the MELA rules and Rötzer rules for breastfeeding and other information about fertility during this period. All the couples that arrive in this situation are derived to the expert in breastfeeding of our team. Thus every couple needs a different and personal tutor according to their situation.

When we planned to start the on-line teaching, we knew that in a face to face interview, questions are proposed while the explanation is going on but this is not so in an e-mail explanation. This is why we stress that the contact between users and experts must be very fluid and constant and the teacher must be extremely precise and sufficiently clarifying in his/her answers and comments.

6.A MATERIAL

Manual Básico de Planificación Familiar Natural. Ed. Esin, S.A.
Disclosure Articles

7.A- LENGTH OF THE COURSE

The course lasts until the teacher and the couple agree that they have acquired the necessary knowledge about the matter. The average length is 6 months.

8.A- RESULTS

8.A.I The on-line teaching program for users started in 2013.

In 2016-2017, 7 couples were taught. In 2018, 2 couples are being taught.

The response of the couples that have received the on-line teaching is being very positive. They consider the facility of getting in contact with the teacher and solving doubts as an important benefit, together with the personal relation that is established with the teacher. The users are grateful about being able to follow the learning at the rhythm that every circumstance and person requires. Last but not least, they value the saving of time and money that such practice allows.

The teachers also value positively the high level of knowledge obtained by the couples and the response and involvement of the men.

8.A-II Users' satisfaction

Up to now, the results are very favourable. A good communication has been established between teachers and users and the response of the last has been excellent.

We now describe a couple of examples, among other experiences.

- a) A Mexican couple who later on moved to Australia got in contact to follow the on-line course.

The woman had important health problems and could not get pregnant until the doctor discharged her. After the training, when her health got better, they decided it was the time to become pregnant. Afterwards, they were able to plan her pregnancies according to her health. Now a day, they have three children and are very grateful for having had the opportunity of learning NFP from abroad. They still maintain the contact with their teacher.

Their testimony: *“For our family it is a great gift to enjoy the peace of knowing that we have the children that we can support and take care of, according to our health. Natural Methods are a part of our common project of life, our deep friendship, how we are open to life, when we decide that it is no longer time to call for parenthood, how is our relationship as spouses and as parents and how do we want to educate our children”*

b) Another couple started a course in presence but as they moved into another Spanish region, they continued via on-line.

Their testimony: *“We knew nothing about this matter, it was absolutely new for us. We only had heard unfavourable comments about it. When taking the course, and getting a deeper knowledge of my body’s way of functioning, my husband has become almost an expert in the analysis of every one of my charts: why does this temperature shift happens, how more days until ovulation, this is the peak day....*

“I cannot miss thanking our teacher and friend. Someone who has always been there when we needed her, who has solved any doubt we proposed to her, and who has taken care of us from the day we met her, till today. We thank her effort and that of the people that belong to associations that develop such human work: to transmit the value of life from its first and most early stage, in the unitive and procreative acts, within marriage”.

These testimonies, among others, thrust us to follow on in this direction, knowing that we can help many couples that don’t have an NFP centre near where they live, but that through the on-line courses they can benefit from the values of NFP.

B- Expert training

As expected, the program starts with the personalist anthropology and the biological basis that sustain NFP. The physiological block is treated differently whether the training is addressed to health professionals or to others.

3.B OBJECTIVES

The objective of the course is the training of experts/teachers of Natural Family Planning
This requires:

- An integrating vision of the different dimensions of human sexuality (basic knowledge of Personalist Anthropology)
- A deeper study of the biological, psychological and emotional differences between man and woman and on combined human fertility.
- An exhaustive knowledge on the Natural Methods used now a day in NFP.
- A pedagogical and psychological capacity to teach and treat the different user couples.
- A personal adherence to the style of life that proposes NFP, that favours its transmission to the users which they teach.
- A basic preparation in order to be able to detect the particular situations of every couple and thus to be able to address them to the specialist, if required.
- An interest to continue and widen the training/investigation in matters related to NFP.

This course is addressed to health professionals: medical doctors, nurses, midwives... and to other users who want to acquire the knowledge that will allow them to transmit the style of life of NFP, as well as the Natural Methods that support it.

4.B CONTENTS

The course is divided into 5 blocks:

1st-

- Personalist Anthropology
- Human Sexuality
- Characteristics and roles of the people involved in NFP.
- Man-woman: Equal but different

2º-

- Anatomy and physiology of human fertility.
- Physiology of the cervical secretion.
- Biophysic parameters of the cervical secretion
- Fertility indicators.
- Combined fertility.

3rd -

- Billings Method in normal situations
- Billings Method in special situations
- Symptothermic Methods in normal situations
- Symptothermic Methods in special situations
- Pathological situations.

4th-

- LAM Method
- RÖTZER Method
- Naprotechnology
- New technologies in fertility awareness.

5th-

- Basic knowledge on contraception
- NFP and health promotion
- Teaching pedagogy

5.B METHODOLOGY

The documentation related to those blocks is sent in two deliveries, with a lap of two weeks in between. After 15 days of the second delivery, we send a partial exam which, after being corrected, is turned back to the pupil. This methodology is repeated in every block.

In the Natural Methods' block, besides the theoretical documentation, we also send a great number of charts to be interpreted by the pupils and sent back to the teacher to be corrected. Those charts are examples of different type of situations that the expert will have to face when teaching his/her users. Some of them will have to be interpreted and others will contain mistakes that they will have to discover and correct. The teacher will review the charts and answer back via e-mail, with clear and extensive comments on the proposed exercise.

Other charts to be worked on contain pathological situations (poliquistic ovaries, thyroid problems...) for them to learn how these situations affect the charts and to prepare them to derive the user to the correspondent specialist.

At the end of the course, the alumni have interpreted around 200 charts. In this way, the pupil, before obtaining the title, will have seen and interpreted as many different situations as possible.

Another important consideration in the training of experts is their pedagogical preparation in order to teach and tutor their users, so that they become autonomous in following the chosen method. The teacher plays a decisive and essential role in this purpose and thus requires her special commitment to transmit the importance of following exactly the rules of the method and to persevere in the observations and registers.

The expert will be trained to transmit the style of life to their pupils. This will help them to make the adequate procreative decisions, and value positively their choice for NFP. When this is achieved, the objective of the teaching will be fulfilled. For this purpose the expert must possess specific characteristics which are also the objective of this course.

.B- MATERIAL

Texto de consulta para expertos de PFN. Ed. RENAFAER
Symposiums'/Congress' Proceedings
Doctoral thesis

7.B- LENGTH OF THE COURSE

The course lasts as a school course. After every block, the pupil undergoes a partial on-line test. At the end of the course, the future expert is submitted to an exhaustive face exam, both oral and written. The written exam includes all the blocks contained in the program. The oral examination is based on the interpretation of charts that reflect normal and special situations.

The teacher dedicates a media of 40 h. per pupil.

The titles given after passing the final exam are provisional and must be supported by two retraining activities.

8.B- RESULTS

8.B.I The on-line expert training program started in 2015.

In 2016-2017, 7 experts from different professional fields were trained (psychology, nursing, pedagogy, chemistry, midwives).

At this moment, 2017-2018, 6 experts with different professional profiles (family medicine, gynaecology, and nursing) are being trained. This makes a total of 13 experts, since its beginning in 2015.

8.B.II- Satisfaction of the trained experts

The alumni that have obtained the title of expert have manifested their positive opinion about the way the course has been conducted, the knowledge and skills acquired and the personal treatment that they have received from their teachers. (Attention, dedication, transmission of the style of life of NFP)

Their exams were excellent, which proved that the on-line via was very useful in the transmission of knowledge on NFP and chart interpretation.

9.-CONCLUSIONS:

The pilot program introduced for the on-line teaching of NFP has been very positive.

The geographical extension of the teaching is much greater and allows not only training, but also having a close and personal follow up of users and experts.

The responses to questions and doubts have been quick and effective.

If we acquire the capacity of assuming more pupils simultaneously, RENAFER presumes that a greater number of them will choose this type of learning.

10.- PROJECTS AND NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

During the time that these pilot programs have been in use, we have used a basic computer system, that consists in the delivery, by e-mail, of the material for study and the charts to be interpreted. Once the charting work has been done they have been sent to the teacher who has corrected them, scanned them and turned back to the pupil.

The partial tests for the expert training and the questions and responses for both courses have also been made via e-mail.

This way of procedure, though effective, requires much time for the teacher and limits the number of pupils that he/she can attend.

Given the excellent result of the project and the difficulties to attend in presence the courses, we foresee a greater demand for the on-line teaching. We nevertheless will have to adapt the computer programs to the requirements of the courses.

A program in which the charts can be filled in will help in the day to day registration. An application for the teacher to correct them automatically would be very useful to help him/her in her training work.

Partial tests prepared to be made in a definite period of time, and its further correction through the computer program, would give a more valuable appreciation of the knowledge of the pupil and would allow the teacher to train simultaneously more pupils.

These improvements would allow him/her to dedicate more time to the specific teaching that every pupil needs, to the solving of doubts, to a deeper explanation of the corrections made and to the presentation and solution of more complex situations.

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