Better menstrual management options for adolescents needed in South Africa: What about the menstrual cup?

To the Editor: Providing forms of menstrual management to women and girls in need has been on the South African (SA) government’s agenda for the past 4 years. A sanitary pads campaign launched in 2014 reported that almost nine million SA girls aged 13 - 19 miss time at school because of lack of sanitary products. In 2010, the World Health Organization reported that the lack of school toilets with privacy and facilities for menstrual hygiene contributes to sporadic attendance and drop-out among young women in Africa. Several other SA initiatives have focused on disposable sanitary towels, as the environmental impact of menstrual waste on sewage systems is considerable. Menstrual pads, tampons and rags routinely block pipes and joints, which is costly, takes time to resolve and imposes health hazards.

The menstrual cup (MCup) is a non-absorbent reusable barrier cup that collects menstrual blood, is typically made of flexible medical-grade silicone, and has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. Unlike tampons, they have not been provided or mentioned in most of the SA menstrual management campaigns to date. Like many other MCups, the SA MPower MCup comes in two sizes, the smaller size being recommended for adolescents. The cost of tampons for one woman per year has been calculated as approximately the same as one MCup at current SA retail prices. In SA the MPower MCup retails for R265.00, while a box of 32 tampons costs approximately R40.00. As the lifespan of one MCup is typically 5 years, MCup use would represent a considerable cost saving over time.

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