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## M.D. TO BE

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# Tomato biopsies and papaya abortions

By **Marianne DiNapoli** on November 17, 2010 at 12:18 PM

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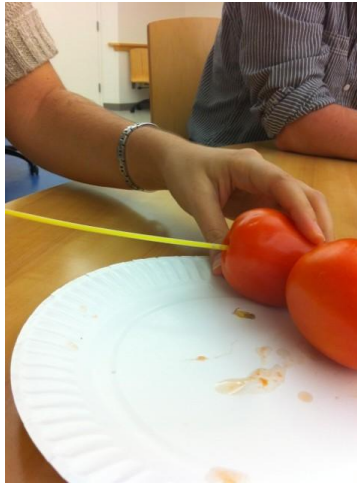
Learning to implant an IUD on a plastic model.

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A few weeks ago, a reader emailed me asking if I would write about if and how abortions are taught in medical school. Coincidentally, I recently attended a Women's Health workshop where we learned how to perform abortions, as well as insert an IUD and take an endometrial biopsy. We learned these three procedures on models of the female anatomy, *not* on actual patients for our first time.

In case you need a refresher course on contraceptive options, an IUD (stands for intra-uterine device) is a small implantable device that, simply by sitting inside a woman's uterus, can prevent pregnancy. Practicing IUD insertion, I have to say, was the least fun of the three. We were given a small plastic model of a uterus, and you basically just push the device

Imagine IUD insertion is much more difficult in real life, when you can't really see what you're doing.



Learning to take an endometrial biopsy on a tomato.

Next, we learned to do an endometrial biopsy, which is a sampling of tissue from the lining of a woman's uterus. A doctor might perform an endometrial biopsy if s/he was concerned about abnormal cell growth or bleeding from within the uterus. We used tomatoes as models of the uterus – much more realistic since women's parts generally resemble fruit much more than a piece of clear plastic. For this procedure, you insert a catheter through the cervix/tomato, pull back on the instrument to create a vacuum, and suck up some tissue/tomato seeds so that you can look at them under a microscope.

Finally, we were taught how to perform a surgical abortion, a slightly more complicated procedure than the IUD implantation or the biopsy. We used papayas for our models, which actually do sort of resemble a cervix and a uterus! First you grip the cervix with a clamp, which looks incredibly painful (this is the scissor-like instrument in the picture). According to the doctor, though, most women don't find it bad as long as local anesthetic is used. Next, you use a series of dilators to coax the cervix open, and then you insert a long tube with suction attached to it. When you release the suction, the contents of the uterus (or papaya seeds) are emptied into the tube. And that's really all there is to it!



Learning to perform a surgical abortion on a papaya.

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I had such a great time learning these procedures, since as you may know, I am **thinking about becoming an OB-GYN** or Family Med doctor who specializes in Women's Health. Hopefully I will have the opportunity to learn and practice these procedures on real patients during my rotations in the upcoming year.

*Thanks so much to the reader who suggested this topic!*