Vulvovaginal Atrophy:  
Opening the Conversation About Sexuality During Menopause

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Disclosures

None
Learning Objectives for Vulvovaginal Atrophy: Opening the Conversation About Sexuality During Menopause

1. The participant will be able to list several drawbacks associated with the term *vulvovaginal atrophy*.

2. The participant will be able to discuss genitourinary syndrome (GSM) with patients.

3. The participant will be able to explain why GSM is the preferred term.
Existing Terminology

Kraurosis Vulvae

Atrophic Vaginitis

Vulvovaginal Atrophy
Vulvovaginal Atrophy – is it the best term? Atrophy?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary:
Decrease in size or wasting away of a body part or tissue
A wasting away or progressive decline

Columbat de l’Isere, 1845:
[ Postmenpausal women’s] “… features are stamped with the impress of age and their genital organs are sealed with the signet of sterility…It is the dictate of prudence to avoid all such circumstances as might tend to awaken any erotic thoughts in the mind and re-animate a sentiment that ought rather become extinct.”

Robert Wilson, 1966:
[ Postmenpausal women] ..witness the death of their own womanhood …the horror of this living decay
We’ve come a long way, but…

Vulva

Vagina

Clitoris

Penis
Vulvovaginal Atrophy – is it the best term?

Problems with the term -

- “Vulva” and “vagina” are not typically used in public
- Atrophy has a negative connotation
- Vaginal atrophy does not cause symptoms in all women
- Symptoms are the real problem
- The term does not include related urinary tract symptoms
NIH Consensus Statement
Volume 10, Number 4 December 7–9, 1992

Impotence
NIH Impotence Consensus Conference Conclusions

- “Erectile dysfunction” should replace “Impotence”
- Embarrassment of patients and clinicians contributes to underdiagnosis
- Treatable
- Consider desires of both patient and partner
- Education of providers and public essential

| Co-Chairs: David Portman, MD and Margery Gass, MD |
| Moderator: Sheryl Kingsberg, PhD |

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| Gloria Bachmann, MD | Cheryl Iglesia, MD | Rossella Nappi MD, PhD |
| Lara Burrows, MD, MSc | Risa Kagan, MD | JoAnn Pinkerton, MD |
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| Andrew Goldstein, MD | Michael Krychman, MD | James Simon, MD |
| Irwin Goldstein, MD | | Cynthia Stuenkel, MD |

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The REVEAL Study – Consumers/Women

- Market research survey in the United States
- 1,006 telephone interviews
- Postmenopausal women aged 45 to 65
- Not currently on hormone therapy

REVEAL (REvealing Vaginal Effects At mid-Life)
Survey Funded by Wyeth, 2009
The REVEAL Study – Healthcare Providers

- Online market research survey in United States
- 602 health care professionals who treat women aged 45 to 65
The REVEAL Study – Women

**Marital Status**
- Married: 66%
- Living with a partner: 2%

**Race**
- White: 80%
- Black: 9%
- Other: 9%

REVEAL (REvealing Vaginal Effects At mid-Life) Survey Funded by Wyeth, 2009
The REVEAL Study – Healthcare Providers

Years of Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Practice</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 yrs</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10 yrs</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 yrs</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20 yrs</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

REVEAL (REvealing Vaginal Effects At mid-Life)
Survey Funded by Wyeth, 2009
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly + Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>45-65 yrs old, % N = 1006</th>
<th>60-65 Years Old, % N = 330</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society is more accepting of discussion around men’s physical sexual problems than women’s physical sexual problems*</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society constrains the sexual expression of women my age more so than men my age</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although medicines are available for men’s physical sexual problems, the same do not exist for women’s physical sexual problems**</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society would prefer to believe that women my age do not have sex</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*73% of providers agreed  
**85% of providers agreed
87% of women reported sexual health was important to them
38% spoke to provider
30% spoke to partner
25% reported dyspareunia
Less than half of women experiencing dyspareunia initiated a conversation with their healthcare provider
The REVEAL Study Results

25% of those surveyed reported dyspareunia. When asked if they discussed it with their provider -

- 44% Did not discuss
- 44% Patient initiated
- 10% Provider initiated

REVEAL (REvealing Vaginal Effects At mid-Life) Survey Funded by Wyeth, 2009
VIVA Survey, US participants

- Vaginal Health, Insights, Views and Attitudes – an online international survey of 3520 postmenopausal women
- 500 postmenopausal women were from the United States
- Age range 55-65 years
- 62% were married (58%) or living as married (4%)

Simon et al. Menopause 2013;20:1043-8
Which term do you think is most suitable to describe this condition?

- "Vaginal dryness": 34
- "Vaginal discomfort": 18
- "Vaginal atrophy": 5
- "Don't know": 20

VIVA Survey, International Cohort

- Vaginal Health, Insights, Views and Attitudes – an online survey of 3520 postmenopausal women
- Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Canada and the United States
- Age range 55-65 years
- 58% were married

Nappi et al. Climacteric 2012;15:36-44
Which term do you think is most suitable to describe this condition?

- "Vaginal dryness": 32
- "Vaginal discomfort": 11
- "Vaginal atrophy": 2
- "Don't know": 23

Nappi et al. *Climacteric* 2012;15:36-44
Describe how women might feel with symptoms of vaginal discomfort:

- Less sexual: 57%
- Negative effect on relationship: 40%
- Lower quality of life: 36%
- Feel old: 31%

Nappi et al. *Climacteric* 2012;15:36-44
Survey Limitations

- May overestimate condition because women with a problem are more likely to participate
- Conditions other than vaginal atrophy may have been responsible for the symptoms
- No physical examination to confirm vaginal atrophy
- Role of corporate sponsors
The term “vulvovaginal atrophy” is not satisfactory because

- It uses “vulva” and “vagina”
- “Atrophy” is too negative for the consumer
- It does not capture the problem: symptoms
- It does not include the lower urinary tract

Goal: A term suitable for professionals, consumers, and media that is descriptive and comprehensive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anatomy</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Life Phase</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vagina</td>
<td>Vulvovaginal</td>
<td>Atrophy</td>
<td>Midlife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulva</td>
<td>Genital</td>
<td>Alterations</td>
<td>Aging</td>
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<td>Labia</td>
<td>Gynecologic</td>
<td>Changes</td>
<td>Menopause</td>
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<td>Vestibule</td>
<td>Reproductive</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Perimenopause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urethra</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Disease</td>
<td>Postmenopause</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bladder</td>
<td>Urogenital</td>
<td>Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genitourinary</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urinary</td>
<td>Dysfunction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urologic</td>
<td>Syndrome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vaginitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Components to Be Covered by Term (cont)

- Vagina
  - Vulvovaginal
  - Genital
- Vulva
  - Gynecologic
  - Reproductive
  - Sexual
- Labia
- Vestibule
- Urethra
- Bladder
- Urogenital
  - Genitourinary

Problem
- Atrophy
- Alterations
- Changes
- Condition
- Disease
- Disorder
- Deficiency
- Deficiency
- Dysfunction
- Syndrome
- Vaginitis
Syndrome

A concurrence of symptoms; the aggregate of signs and symptoms associated with any morbid process
Components to Be Covered by Term (cont)

- Vagina
- Vulva
- Labia
- Vestibule
- Urethra
- Bladder

Urogenital Syndrome
Genitourinary Syndrome

Life Phase
- Midlife
- Aging
- Menopause
- Perimenopause
- Postmenopause
Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)

- A collection of symptoms and signs associated with decreased estrogen levels that can involve the labia majora/minora, vestibule/introitus, clitoris, vagina, urethra, and bladder

- Treatment indicated if symptoms are bothersome

- Treatment should be individualized based on severity of symptoms and the woman’s preference after discussion of treatment options and risks/benefits
Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM) Symptoms and Signs

Symptoms
- Genital dryness
- Decreased lubrication with sexual intercourse
- Discomfort with sexual activity
- Irritation/burning/itching
- Dysuria
- Urinary frequency/urgency
- Recurrent urinary tract infection

Signs
- Decreased moisture
- Decreased elasticity
- Labial resorption
- Pallor/erythema
- Loss of vaginal rugae
- Tissue fragility/fissures/petechiae

Supportive findings: pH >5, increased parabasal cells on maturation index
Ask if she is experiencing any menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal discomfort with or without sexual activity.

Ask if these symptoms are manageable or if they are having an unwanted effect on her quality of life.
Discuss available options (lifestyle changes, OTC options, prescriptions medications)

If woman is not sexually active, ask if she is interested in preserving vaginal sexual function
Share the new term **GSM** with your patients so that they have a more comfortable way to discuss the topic.