Women's Sexual Health after Transplant

Celebrating a Second Chance at Life Survivorship Symposium

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Women’s Sexual Health After Transplant

2021 Celebrating a Second Chance at Life BMT InfoNet Survivorship Symposium

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Visit www.bmtinfonet.org
Presentation

- What are some of the sexual difficulties women encounter after transplant?
- How frequently do sexual difficulties occur?
- How do sexual difficulties impact quality of life?
- What are the causes and risk factors for sexual difficulties?
- What are some strategies to address sexual difficulties?

It’s Not Just About Sex......
Sexuality is a central aspect of the human experience.

Is Sexuality Important?

- Altered sexuality negatively affects the quality of life of the transplant survivor AND intimate partner
- 1. Affect on family / partner
- 2. Loss of hair
- 3. Fatigue
- 4. Affect on role responsibilities
- 5. Affects on social activities
- 6. Loss of sexual feelings

Causes of Sexual Difficulties

• The cancer
• Emotional distress associated with the diagnosis and treatment for survivor and partner
• Cancer treatment
• Side effects and complications of treatment
• Alterations in relationships during and following treatment

Types of Sexual Difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Problem</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Interest</td>
<td>51 – 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painful sexual intercourse</td>
<td>33 – 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal difficulties</td>
<td>11 – 52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty with orgasm</td>
<td>42 – 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in sexual activity</td>
<td>57 – 68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual dissatisfaction</td>
<td>22 – 52%</td>
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Dimensions of Sexuality

Physical

Emotional

Sexuality

Social

Physical Dimension of Sexuality

- Menopause
- Vaginal Alterations
  - Menopause
  - Radiation
  - Chronic Graft Versus Host Disease
- Fatigue
- Changes in appearance
- Medications
Symptoms of Menopause

- Hot flashes / night sweats
- Vaginal changes
  - dryness
  - loss of elasticity
  - increased risk of infections
- Trouble sleeping
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Changes in appearance
- Osteoporosis / bone loss

Hot Flash arriving on platform six in one minute
Emotional Dimension of Sexuality

- Depression and anxiety
- Body image changes
  - Decreases self-confidence and self-esteem
- Menopause
  - Loss of youth and femininity
- Infertility

Social Dimension of Sexuality

- Intimate partner
  - emotional distress
  - sexual health
- Role changes
  - Lover ↔ Caregiver
  - Lover ↔ Patient
- Distress in relationships often leads to sexual problems
Caregiver Distress

- Caregivers experienced
  - Less social support
  - More loneliness
  - Less marital satisfaction
  - Less spiritual well-being
  - Less post-traumatic growth
- Spousal caregivers had a decline in marital satisfactions scores one-year after transplant while transplant survivors had stable scores

Challenges in Addressing Sexual Health

- **No**
  - Established guidelines as to what sexual activities are safe / unsafe
  - Systematic approach to assessing sexual health
  - Well researched interventions

- **Limited**
  - Guidance on when survivors may engage in sexual activity
  - Network of healthcare providers to provide expertise, support, guidance and therapeutic interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthcare Providers</th>
<th>Transplant Survivors</th>
<th>Intimate Partner / Couple</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal discomfort</td>
<td>Fear being dismissed</td>
<td>Difficulty establishing or re-establishing intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of education</td>
<td>Fear making healthcare provider uncomfortable</td>
<td>Difficulty communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Time</td>
<td>Fear there are no treatment options</td>
<td>Fear of rejection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Menopause Replacement Therapy

- May improve interest, arousal and decrease painful intercourse
- Goal is tailored therapy aimed at symptom relief
- Menopause replacement therapy decreased hot flashes, mood swings, trouble sleeping and vaginal dryness by over 50% within a month of beginning therapy

Should I take hormones?

- Health History
- Family History
- Personal beliefs

Menopause Replacement Therapy
- Oral
- Transdermal
- Vaginal
Non-Hormonal Therapy for Hot Flashes

- Antidepressants
- Anticonvulsants
- Anticholinergics
- Progestins
- Vitamin E
- Soy
- Black cohosh
- Homeopathy
- Dietary changes
- Relaxation training
- Exercise
- Acupuncture
- Reflexology

Androgen Therapy

- Androgen therapy may improve sexual functioning
  - No androgen therapies are FDA approved for treating female sexual problems
  - Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA)
    - stimulate local tissue synthesis of estrogen and testosterone without increasing blood levels
Vaginal Dryness and Painful Intercourse

- Menopause replacement therapy
- Ospemifene (Osphena®)
  - Non-estrogen oral pill
- Prolong foreplay
- Assume a position that allows you to control rate and depth of penetration
- Non-penetrative sexual activity
- Explore other body parts

Vaginal Dryness and Painful Intercourse

- Vaginal moisturizers used to improve vaginal tissue health
  - Hyaluronic acid-based gel (Hyalofemme®)
  - Estriol based cream (Ovestin®)
  - Replens®
- Vaginal lubricants are intended for use during sexual activity to reduce pain and irritation
  - Water or silicone based
  - Pure oils (olive oil or coconut oil)
Gwyneth Paltrow Is Selling Vibrators

“So many vibrators look hypersexualized,” said Gwyneth Paltrow, seen here at the Goop offices.

Credit...Alex Welsh for The New York Times

Vaginal Chronic Graft Versus Host Disease

- Prevention
  - Topical estrogen
  - Early initiation of menopause replacement hormones
  - Vaginal dilatation in the absence of sexual activity
- Treatment
  - Topical steroids
  - Topical cyclosporine
  - Vaginal dilatation

Results

Increased
- sexual activity
- interest in sex
- satisfaction
- vaginal lubrication

Decreased
- pain
- depression

Improved quality of life


Sensate Focus Exercises
- Touching exercises
- Goal is to establish intimacy
- Full body touching every 2-3 days with hands and fingers only
  - Initially no touching of chest or genitals
- No talking
- Intimacy can reduce emotional distress and facility recover
Is Emily Morse the Dr. Ruth of a new generation?

- Radio Show, Podcast, Master Class
- Her focus is to remove the stigma about sex
- “The more we talk about sex the better sex we are going to have”

Credit: Béatrice de Géa for the New York Times

Psychoeducation Therapies

- Improvements in sexual functioning and quality of life have been demonstrated with:
  - Mind-body interventions
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy
  - Couples based interventions and counseling
  - On-line formats to address sexuality and relationship issues
In summary

- Be empowered to talk with your healthcare provider
  - Ask for guidance on sexual activity
  - Ask for a referral
- Alterations in sexual health may be physical, emotional or social
- Treatment options are available
- Effective treatment is a combination of education, support and symptom management

Predictors of Healthy Sexual Adjustment

- Good relationship before transplant
- Satisfying sexual relationship before transplant
- A partner who desires sex
- Support from partner

Visit www.bmtinfonet.org
• BMT InfoNet
• American Cancer Society
• Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
• Be The Match
• American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists
• CancerCare
• Oncolink
• CancerConnect
• National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
• and there are many more......
Questions?

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