

Health Literacy in Women's Health

Where are we at and how can we improve?

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Background

Health literacy plays an important part in the safety and quality of health care.

Low levels of health literacy have been found to be associated with one and a half to three times greater likelihood of experiencing a poorer health outcome, at the individual level¹.

There is limited data assessing health literacy, particularly with a focus on women's health, in Australia.

Methods

A survey was designed to assess obstetric and gynaecological health literacy amongst patients. Ethical approval was granted by the WCHN HREC.

The survey was then offered to eligible patients attending O&G services across four hospitals in SA during early 2019 (covering rural through to tertiary services), as well as Nursing/Midwifery staff and Medical Officers in O&G. Patients who did not speak English or were under the age of 18 were excluded from participating.

Results were analysed and compared to pre-determined answers using contemporaneous evidence-based guidelines and resources.

Results

Knowledge of how often a cervical screening test should be performed is still poor for patients:

- 5-yearly
 - 45.5% of patients vs 86.9% of staff
- 2-yearly
 - 41.9% of patients vs 11.8% of staff

Contraception effectiveness knowledge was poor amongst patients and Nursing/Midwifery staff:

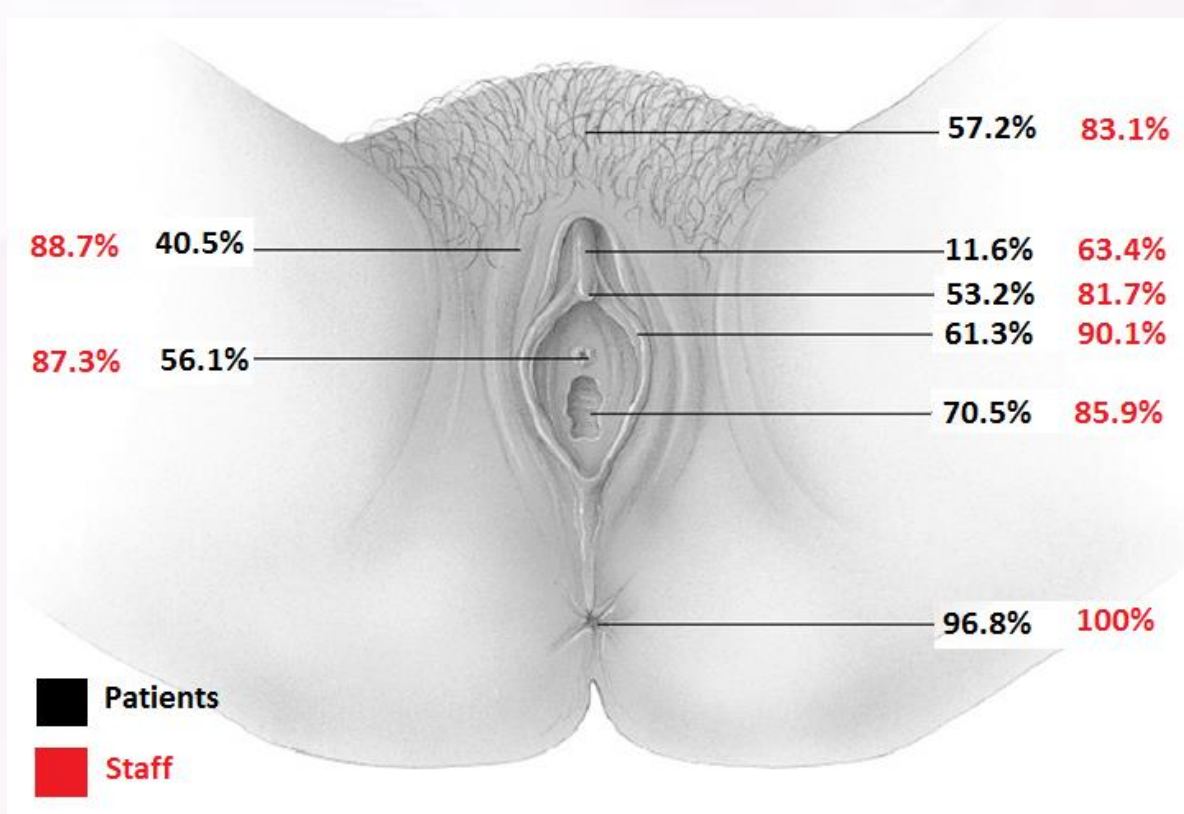
- Recognition OCP more effective than condoms
 - 44.4% patients vs 56.6% nurses/midwives vs 84.2% medical officers

Overall effectiveness was considered higher than with typical use:

- Average effectiveness for condoms
 - 92.6% patients vs 93.1% nurses/midwives vs 86.4% medical officers
- Average effectiveness for OCP
 - 95.1% patients vs 96.3% nurses/midwives vs 95.5% medical officers

Knowledge of female anatomical terms was very poor amongst patients, and limited amongst staff.:

- Percentage who labelled the landmark with an acceptable term (correct or colloquial)



Knowledge of pregnancy outcome was very poor amongst both patients and staff:

- Correct identification of number of primips who spontaneously labour² (48.43%)
 - 10.3 % of patients – average answer 60.39%
 - 19.4% of staff – average answer 60.05%
- Correct identification of number of primips who have a normal vaginal delivery² (42.25%)
 - 4.3% of patients – average 68.11%
 - 11.9% of staff – average 59.85%

Discussion

Poor health literacy, in regards to women's health, amongst patients attending O&G services can have significant impact on their overall health.

This lack of knowledge can lead to communication errors, impaired decision making and health complications.

As key stakeholders in women's health, we should be taking the time to ensure our patients are educated about their own health and anatomy. We also need to review our own and our colleague's knowledge, to ensure that correct information is being communicated to patients.

Want to know more?

Attend free communication on Monday 14/10/19
16.20-16.30 in Goldfields Room 3

References:

1. Literacy and health outcomes: systematic review of the literature. Journal of General Internal Medicine 2004;19:1228-1239
2. AIHW 2016 data

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