

# Patients get little advice about effect of gynaecological cancer on sexuality, study says

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A study in Ireland found that women recovering from gynaecological cancer received little advice from healthcare professionals about the effects of the disease on sexuality. This was not as important in initial stages of diagnosis and treatment where patients were dealing with life and death issues. However, it became much more important as they entered the recovery phase and had to deal with the effect of the disease on their relationships with partners.

A study of women with gynaecological cancers has found that none of the patients received information about how the disease might affect their sexuality.

Although issues of life and death were viewed as more important at diagnosis, as patients entered the period of survivorship, sexuality became an increasingly important part of their recovery.

The study, conducted in Ireland and reported in the latest issue of [Cancer Nursing Practice](#), reported vivid participant accounts of the devastating effect of gynaecological cancer diagnosis and treatment on all aspects of sexuality.

One patient recounted an experience of asking her doctor for a stronger lubrication jelly but was denied a prescription. 'I had to ask and I was made to feel... like I was [having sex](#) with everyone,' she reported.

The authors said such an experience highlighted the need for healthcare

professionals to be non-judgemental when addressing sexual concerns.

'All participants reported receiving no information from any member of the healthcare team about the potential effects of treatment for gynaecological cancer on sexuality. There was a sense of frustration and anger that healthcare professionals neglected to address this fundamental issue,' they said.

Sexuality was identified as more than the physical act of sexual intercourse. 'It had a deeper meaning and was concerned with attitude, [femininity](#), appearance and relationships,' the authors said.

The disease and treatment affected not just the frequency of [sexual intercourse](#) in relationships but had an impact on intimacy and affection between the women and their partners.

The authors say the findings of the study challenge [healthcare professionals](#) to adopt a holistic view towards sexuality and women with gynaecological cancers.

'Providing patients with required information should be the first step in sexual rehabilitation,' they add.

'Written and verbal information should be provided to all women on the sexual consequences of gynaecological cancer and its treatment.

The authors say there are no information booklets on sexuality and cancer published in Ireland although detailed information on [sexuality](#) after [cancer diagnosis](#) is available from Macmillan Cancer Support.

**More information:** Cleary V, Hegarty J, McCarthy G (2013) How a diagnosis of gynaecological cancer affects women's sexuality. *Cancer Nursing Practice*. 12, 1, 32-37.

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