



8th Congress of the European Society of Contraception
"A holistic approach to sexual health: is it needed, appropriate and possible"
23-26 June 2004
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Report from Meet the Expert session:
" Psychosex (general) "
Thursday 24 & Friday 25 June 2004, 13:00-14:00

Experts: Prof.Dr. Gill Wakley (UK) & Dr. Rik H.W. van Lunsen (The Netherlands)

(This Meet the Expert session was repeated on 25 June. This report summarises both sessions.)

R. van Lunsen (June 24th) and G. Wakley (24th & 25th) gave a brief introduction. Short accounts and discussion of problems in the management of sexual problems presented in clinical encounters followed. The take-home messages included the following in summary:

The introduction emphasised the importance of integrating in the history information from all angles including the clinical, biological, sociological and interpersonal. It was made clear that most problems can be managed within the normal working consultation of health professionals. Embarrassment or a lack of common language for sexual parts or practices may cause extra difficulties. Never assume that you know what the problem is, or what has caused it, as the underlying cause for this individual may be quite different from the last person with a similar problem. Be an active, thinking listener and establish clearly, what the problem is for each individual. If the information you have is insufficient, think *why* you have not been told about particular aspects of the problem. It is not enough just to ask lots of questions, but also to understand why you might need to ask them.

Patients can present openly or they may test you out before revealing the real reason for their consultation. Covert presentations are common. The sexual difficulty may be hidden because the patient is not aware of the connection between it and the problem presented. Sometimes, the sexual difficulty is hidden because of fear of ridicule, disapproval or of the consequences of revealing it.

Investigate only when indicated by the history of the complaint. Undertake screening investigations if there is a clear benefit - such as checking the blood sugar and blood pressure in a man with gradual onset of impotence.

Refer as part of a joint decision. Understand that some patients find it difficult to consult a familiar health professional with sexual problems. You may find the problem too complex, or too distressing, to manage yourself. You cannot refer appropriately before you understand the nature of the problem, and often explaining the problem to a professional with good consulting skills can enable patients to understand the problem or find a suitable solution for themselves.

Common problems presented fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of desire
- Dislike of sex
- Poor performance or satisfaction
- Medical conditions
- Drugs
- Breakdown of relationship
- Stress or tiredness

Overlap between categories often occurs.

Training in the UK is available from:

1. For doctors: Institute of Psychosexual Medicine, 12 Chandos Street, London W1G 9DR or www.ipm.org.uk
2. For doctors and other health professionals: British Association of Sexual and Relationship Therapists, PO Box 13686, London SW20 9ZH or www.basrt.org.uk

Professor Gill Wakley, 9.8.04