



Why 'vagina' should be part of every young woman's vocabulary

Call for young women to face up to embarrassment about gynaecological health as new charity survey reveals dangerous knowledge gap amongst UK women

Young women in the UK are less educated than their elder counterparts about the symptoms and issues around gynaecological cancers; and worryingly, more embarrassed to discuss them than older women. This is according to a new survey released today by women's cancer research charity, The Eve Appeal.

One in five women aged 16-25 years surveyed couldn't name a single correct symptom of any of the five gynaecological cancers, and **less than a quarter** said they felt confident that they were well informed about gynaecological health issues, compared to over **42%** of women aged 66-75.

Perhaps more shockingly, it's the language of gynaecological health that is proving an additional barrier to young women opening up about concerns around gynaecological cancers, with **65%** saying they have a problem using the words vagina or vulva, and nearly **40%** of 16-25 year olds resorting to using code names such as 'lady parts' or 'women's bits' to discuss gynaecological health.

Lack of basic anatomical knowledge is also an issue, with women in the younger age groups struggling to correctly identify the five areas that can be affected by gynaecological cancer (womb, cervix, ovaries, vagina and vulva) on a simple diagram - just **half** of women aged 26-35 were able to label the vagina accurately. In contrast older women aged 66-75 were much better educated about their bodies, with **eight in ten** able to correctly label ovaries and nearly **nine in ten** the womb.

It's not just a knowledge gap between the different generations that was revealed by the survey however, as the data also showed a distinct difference in attitudes towards talking about gynaecological health issues. Whilst more than **one in ten** of 16-35 year olds said they found it very hard to talk to their GPs about gynaecological health concerns, and nearly **a third** admitted that they had avoided going to the doctors altogether with gynaecological issues due to embarrassment, these figures dramatically decrease amongst women in the older age groups.

These findings are in direct contrast with the popular misconception that society is more open these days, making it much easier for women of younger generations to talk about gynaecological health. Nearly **three quarters** of all women surveyed across every age group agreed with this statement, and over **60%** said they thought that young women knew more about gynaecological health than older women.

Helena Morrissey, Chairman of The Eve Appeal commented:



“At the Eve Appeal we know how important it is to promote straight talking about the signs and symptoms of gynaecological cancers to women of all ages, and this survey has highlighted just how far we still have to go to make this happen.

“These cancers have some of the worst outcomes for women, with a 40% mortality rate. Understanding the symptoms will save lives, which is why we are urging women this Gynaecological Cancer Awareness Month to talk more openly about these life-saving issues.”

With the survey results showing that over half of women (**51%**) would find it easy to talk to their female friends about gynaecological health concerns, and more than a third (**34%**) saying the same of their sister, The Eve Appeal is encouraging women to get together this GCAM and visit **www.eveappeal.org.uk** to learn more about the risks and symptoms of gynaecological cancers, as well as sharing their knowledge and experiences.

Currently 53 women are diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer every day in the UK, making GCAM 2014 the perfect time to increase awareness of the need for greater understanding of this issue amongst women of all generations.

For more information about Gynaecological Cancer Awareness Month (GCAM) visit **www.eveappeal.org.uk**.