



**DIFFERENCES IN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S
SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PHYSICIANS**

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ABSTRACT: We evaluated differences in men's and women's expectations of physicians in sexual health matters. One hundred and eighteen adults (62 men, 56 women) were surveyed for 1) a sexual problems list, 2) their prior use of professionals for sexual consultation and preferred qualities in such professionals, 3) sexual attitudes, and 4) expectations of the physician regarding sexual health concerns. For both women and men, results indicated that the physician was the professional most preferred for consultation regarding sexual concerns and that both men and women look for qualities of empathy, professionalism, and confidentiality in their doctors. Although 95% of women and 97% of men reported prior sexual concerns, only 19% of men and 68% of women had seriously discussed these issues with their doctor. Although men's and women's responses were similar regarding sexual attitudes and expectations of physicians, men took notably less initiative in addressing their sex problems, apparently because of greater anxiety about sex. Physicians similarly took less initiative in discussing sexual concerns with men. In spite of patient discomfort, more frequent sexual problem consultations were desired by 74% of men and 32% of women.

Key words: sexual health gender differences expectations of physicians

INTRODUCTION

Although sexual medicine has an increasingly impressive body of scientific knowledge, little inquiry has been made into the sexual health attitudes of patients and their expectations for physician assistance with sexuality problems (Nease & Liese, 1987; Blake et al., 1986; House & Pendleton, 1986). Recent studies indicate that 30% to 48% of men and 40% to 68% of women have one or more sexual concerns at any given time (Scheim et al., 1988; Ende, Rockwell & Glasgow, 1984; Slag, 1983; Frank, Anderson & Rubenstein, 1978). However, other studies indicate that patients' sexual concerns are generally underestimated and are not routinely addressed in general medical practice (Steinert & Rosenberg, 1988; Cassata & Kirkman-Liff, 1981; Schnarch, 1981; Harrison & Houge, 1977; Marsland, Wood, & Mayo, 1976). At the same time, it is a

common assumption that the physician is the professional of choice for dealing with sexual problems. While there is a scarcity of consumer-supplied information about patients' expectations of physicians and their objectives for sexual health attention, available data support the important role of the primary care physician as sexual health care provider. For example, patients have a positive view of the appropriateness of the physician taking a sexual history (Ende, Rockwell & Glasgow, 1984), the physician is the preferred professional for sexuality consultation, and patients look for physician leadership and assistance with sexual health concerns (Metz & Seifert, 1990; 1988; Steinert & Rosenberg, 1988).

In this report we examine the major similarities and differences between women's and men's expectations, experiences, and objectives in addressing