

# **Strategies for women and professionals for managing the menstrual cycle of women with vision impairments**

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# Background

- ❖ Why important
- ❖ Relevance to Occupational Therapy (OT) and teachers of students with visual impairments
- ❖ Activity of Daily Living (ADL)



# Approach

- ❖ Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews
- ❖ 6 interviews face-to-face; 1 via Skype
- ❖ Audio recorded
- ❖ Notes taken
- ❖ Email survey of Occupational Therapists at Vision Australia



# Who?

- ❖ 7 participants
- ❖ 6 from Victoria, Australia; 1 from Zimbabwe
- ❖ Aged 16 to 70
- ❖ 5 menstruating
- ❖ 1 has reached menopause
- ❖ 1 undergoing menopausal transition



# Eye Conditions

| Eye Condition        | Time since onset | Number |
|----------------------|------------------|--------|
| Totally blind        | Birth            | 2      |
| Retinitis pigmentosa | 20 years         | 1      |
| Macular degeneration | 30 years         | 1      |
| Aniridia             | Birth            | 1      |
| Diabetic retinopathy | 7 years          | 1      |
| Optic atrophy        | 4 years          | 1      |



# Knowing what to expect before their first period

| Resources        | Number | Notes                           |
|------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| No idea          | 2      | Rhubarb                         |
| Sex Ed           | 5      | Quality and quantity varied     |
| Mother           | 4      | All grew up with their mother   |
| Sister/s         | 1      | Four participants have sister/s |
| Peers            | 3      | Variable quality                |
| Books,<br>videos | 3      | Every Woman book                |



# Knowing when their period is due

- ❖ Regular period/on the Pill: know the date
- ❖ All women reported premenstrual syndrome (PMS) occurring ~ 2 days before period begins – panty liner in

# Pads and tampons



Photos taken by  
Freya McGregor, 2014.





# **Pads vs Tampons**

- ❖ Visual aspect not relevant to this choice for six participants

## **Knowing when to change a pad or tampon**

- ❖ Some strategies similar to sighted women
- ❖ Can see contrasting blood on white pad
- ❖ Feels weight of pad
- ❖ Husband/son checks pad

# Supermarket shopping

- ❖ Strategy depended on eye condition
- ❖ Looks closely; takes a long time
- ❖ Colour of packaging, difficult if changes
- ❖ Feels package if 'regular' or 'overnight'
- ❖ Knows location of item
- ❖ Asks for assistance
- ❖ Takes enough on holiday



Photos taken by Freya McGregor, 2014.



# Disposing used sanitary items in unfamiliar places

- ❖ Avoids public toilets
- ❖ BYO zip lock bag to take home used tampon
- ❖ Orientates herself to bin location before sitting down



Photos taken by Freya McGregor, 2014.





# Leaks

- ❖ Wears dark coloured garments
- ❖ Washes garments every day
- ❖ Feels for leaks
- ❖ Family or friends tell her
- ❖ Jacket around the waist
- ❖ Wears two pads overnight



# Survey of 71 OTs

- ❖ 26 responses
- ❖ Only 9 had ever brought it up with clients.
- ❖ Only 3 had had a client bring it up with them.
- ❖ Uncomfortable; ill-informed of strategies
- ❖ Many clients are aged 65+; thus issue not relevant to their clients (?)



# Conclusions

- ❖ No evidence of structured training for OTs
- ❖ OTs avoiding issue
- ❖ Some practices unhygienic and awkward
- ❖ Packaging unsuitable for ease of identification
- ❖ Supermarkets not appropriately designed
- ❖ Lack of standard design of sanitary bins or public toilet layout



# Recommendations

- ❖ Professionals (including teachers!) need to discuss
- ❖ Larger sample size
- ❖ Investigate international strategies
- ❖ Accessible instructions for tampons
- ❖ Appropriate sexuality education

- I'm currently preparing a manuscript on this research for (hopeful) publication in the *Journal of Vision Impairment and Blindness*, so keep your eyes out!
- For further information, ideas, thoughts and comments, please email me at [freya\\_mcg@hotmail.com](mailto:freya_mcg@hotmail.com) . I look forward to hearing from you!