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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eye Condition</th>
<th>Time since onset</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totally blind</td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retinitis pigmentosa</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macular degeneration</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aniridia</td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optic atrophy</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Knowing what to expect before their first period

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

Pads vs. Tampons

- Visual aspect not relevant to this choice for six participants
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
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. I look forward to hearing from you!