



Thursday Memo – February 12, 2015

Sex Ed 101 - by Pam Adelstein

"You talk about sex things, right?" My patient inquires, as we wrap up her visit. (It is ALWAYS at the conclusion of the appointment somehow.)

"Absolutely," I reply. Sex ed I always have time for –it's one of my favorite parts of the job.

Somehow having MD after one's name confers expertise in:

- Women's anatomy 101 – normal or not? My patient tells me that she thinks her genitalia doesn't look normal. After describing how what she believes should look different, she asks me, "You remember what mine looks like, right?" I nod, despite having done her pap smear two years ago.

And then I reassure her – her body is absolutely normal.

- Hair hygiene - shaving, waxing, Nair, au natural, and those awful shaving bumps and ingrown hairs. Doing gyn exams teaches about the numerous pubic hair configurations. (And no, it doesn't bother me at all that you didn't shave your legs or get a pedicure on the day that I do your pap.)

- Discharge, discharge, and discharge - need I say more? We providers have the constant challenge of explaining that some discharge is normal. And only on those dreaded douche commercials do vaginas smell like roses!

- Orgasm- normalizing her experience and expectations (it's not like the movies!). Women's relief is palpable when they learn that other women have difficulty achieving orgasm, too.

- Masturbation– I channel former surgeon general Jocelyn Elders - my patient smiles as she confides she just bought a Silver Bullet. I tell women about the "use it or lose it" talk I went to by a noted sex therapist.

- Libido- of course you have no sex drive at the end of the day cleaning, cooking, shopping, and caring for your partner and four children!

- Breasts- Just like our hands and feet, one side is larger than the other!

-Interpreting the code: "I want to be tested."

And so, when my daughter complains that I am ALWAYS asking her if she has questions about her body changing and growing I respond, “I’m asking you because this is what I do for work – answer people’s questions about their bodies.”

I don't think she buys my explanation, however. But I will keep trying.