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Vocalising pain is a must

14 May 2021 | Views | By Dr Manbeena Chawla

One of the most important commandments every woman should follow to get optimum reproductive healthcare is to take your pain seriously



Women have unique health issues. In fact, some of the health issues that affect both men and women can affect women very differently. For instance, women are more likely to die following a heart attack than men; or the effects of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can be more serious in women. Talking of STDs, there is a stream of stubborn reproductive health disorders affecting women of all ages, the complexity of which requires a more intensive approach.

Did you know that every woman has a right to sexual and reproductive health, no matter which part of the world she hails from, what age she is, or what her ethnicity or religion is? This is the reason the International Day of Action for Women's Health or International Women's Health Day has been observed every year on May 28 since 1987.

One of the most important commandments every woman should follow to get optimum reproductive healthcare is to take your pain seriously. Many women consider pain to be a natural part of their reproductive life, but severe pain can have a debilitating effect on your physical as well as mental health.

Endometriosis is one such problem that is affecting about 200 million women worldwide. Out of this, approximate 25 million women are estimated to be suffering in India. To put it straight, 1 in 10 women between the age group of 15 and 49 live with endometriosis. And studies have shown that genes are likely to play a major role here.

Endometriosis occurs when tissue starts to grow outside of the uterus on the ovaries, fallopian tubes or other areas near the uterus, such as the bowel or bladder. These growths lead to painful periods, pelvic pain between periods and/or pain with intercourse. On an average, it can take up to 10 years for women to receive a diagnosis of endometriosis. While in the past it was diagnosed through major abdominal surgery, today laparoscopy is the most common method to diagnose endometriosis and remove the tissue.

Research has shown that endometriosis often goes undetected because women's reports of pain and other symptoms aren't taken seriously. In some cases, women also diminish their own pain and falsely believe that everyone must be going through this. While it is very common for gynaecologists to prescribe birth control to reduce the symptoms, this is not a cure and does not eliminate endometriosis lesions, as drug therapy that can destroy endometriosis is yet to be discovered.

Fortunately, groups such as the World Endometriosis Organisation are now working with the medical community and policy-makers to ensure that physicians have a greater understanding of how to screen for this condition.

Addressing this condition is all the more important as it is one of the biggest causes of female infertility. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, almost 40 per cent of women who experience infertility have endometriosis.

Although surgery is the only possible cure for endometriosis, it can cause menopause in women who have not gone through it naturally. As a result, medical experts are working relentlessly towards finding a better treatment. But more than the treatment, it is the timely and convenient diagnosis which requires more attention. A huge relief in this regard is being provided by a team of researchers from Penn State College of Medicine in the US, by developing a blood test to diagnose endometriosis. This could indeed shorten the time to diagnosis and treatment and may prevent years of uncomfortable symptoms, and disease progression.

However, endometriosis is not the only reproductive health condition that can cause severe pain. Certain menstrual disorders, such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) or fibroids, can also affect a woman's quality of life. Sometimes these conditions go unnoticed because of the subjective nature of pain. But the most painful fact is that research shows that women's pain is taken less seriously, often dismissed as being the result of emotions. Perhaps, the fight for better care for women's health is one that is worth it.

Dr Manbeena Chawla

(manbeena.chawla@mmactiv.com)