Servicewomen’s experiences of managing their pelvic health

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Disclosures

- The following presentation is the view of the presenter and does not represent the views of the Australian Defence Force.
- This presentation has been cleared for public release by Joint Health Command.
- The presenter has no conflicts of interest to disclose.
Audience questions to be held till panel discussion

• https://www.menti.com/aluv7nndsoc1

• Go to www.menti.com and use the code 8764 0383
Background

Exploring the patterns, practices, and experiences of military women who managed genitourinary symptoms in deployed settings

Prevalence of lower urinary tract symptoms in a cohort of Australian servicewomen and female veterans
O’Shea et al, 2022

https://www.menti.com/alu7ndon01 OR www.menti.com and use the code 8764 0383
Aim

To explore the impacts of pelvic health issues on ADF women, and their experiences of managing their pelvic health in occupational settings.

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Method

• Participants volunteered to take part by contacting researchers via email after completion of the survey.
• Six servicewomen and two veterans.
• Semi-structured telephone interviews.
• Systematic thematic analysis.

Demographic data on participants (n = 6)
• Av. age: 43 yrs.
• Av. service: 22 yrs.
• Times deployed 0-9.
Themes

Maintaining pelvic health as service personnel
- Awareness and prevention of pelvic health conditions
- Suppressing the urge to go
- Adjusting hydration depending upon toilet access
- Managing menstruation
- Regaining ‘full’ fitness post-partum
- Inhibiting conversations about women’s health

Coping with pelvic health issues as a service member
- Self-managing symptoms
- Diagnosing and treating pelvic conditions
- Support for servicewomen’s pelvic health
"It frustrates me how little I knew about, sometimes it baffles me how we, as women, how little we know about our own body".

Awareness and prevention of pelvic health conditions
Suppressing the urge to go

“The requirement to be on watch without the ability to take a break to go to the toilet exists. ... In times of higher tempo that time would increase. The requirement would be six or eight hours of a working day”.
Inhibiting conversations about women’s health

“I mean the thing is that you can’t just go, I am a girl. And we don’t want to do that either. ... We don’t want to be seen as a girl”.
Support for servicewomen’s pelvic health

- Commence education about pelvic health in basic training
- Provide education about pelvic health norms
- Promote regular toilet breaks when not under operational constraints
- Educate PTI to incorporate pelvic floor health and strength into musculoskeletal monitoring
- Increase monitoring of pelvic symptoms and conditions
- Encourage servicewomen to seek help earlier
References

