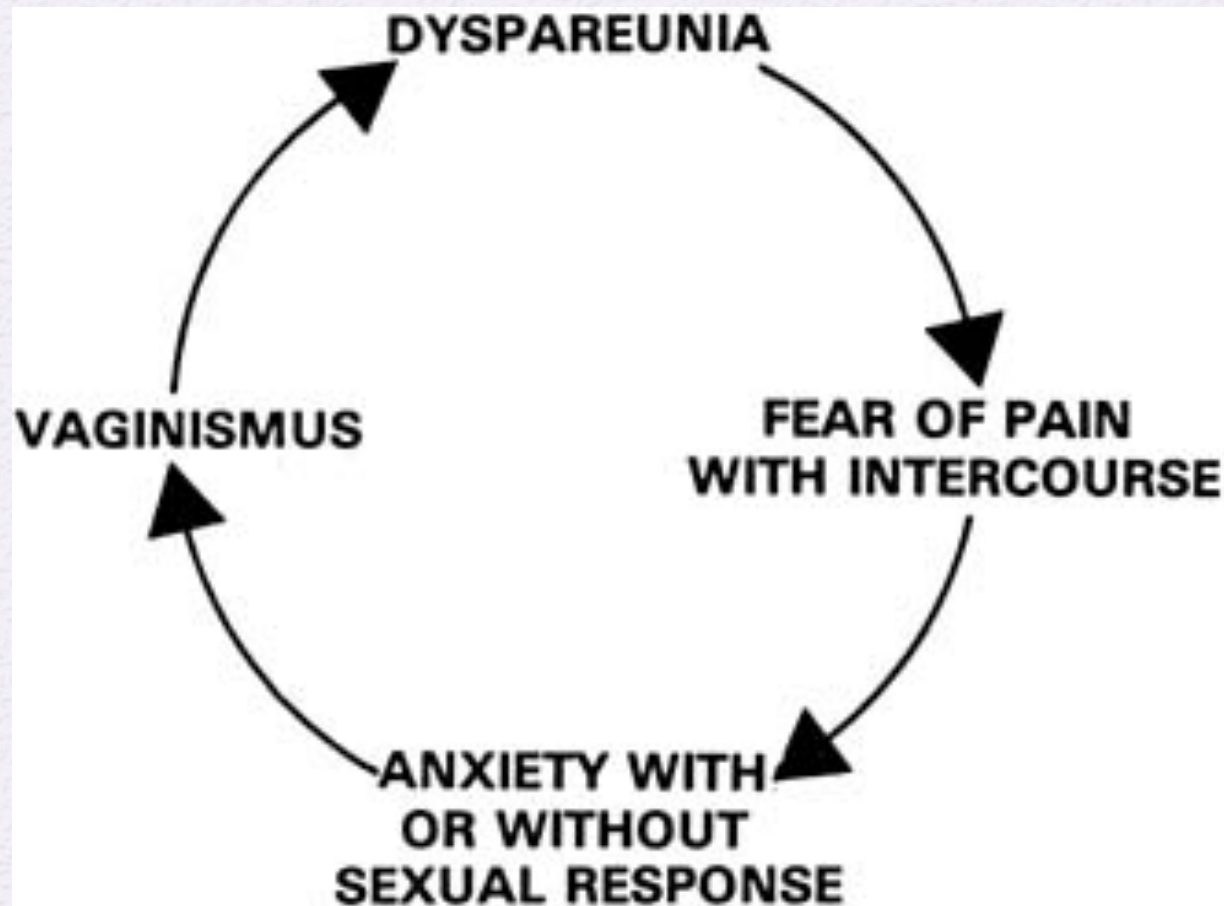


*Managing Women's
Sexual Pain:
Patient Empowerment or
Medicalization in
Disguise?*

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Women's Sexual Pain



Question:

- Are professionally-led desensitization techniques a sign of **patient empowerment** or **the same old medicalization in disguise?**

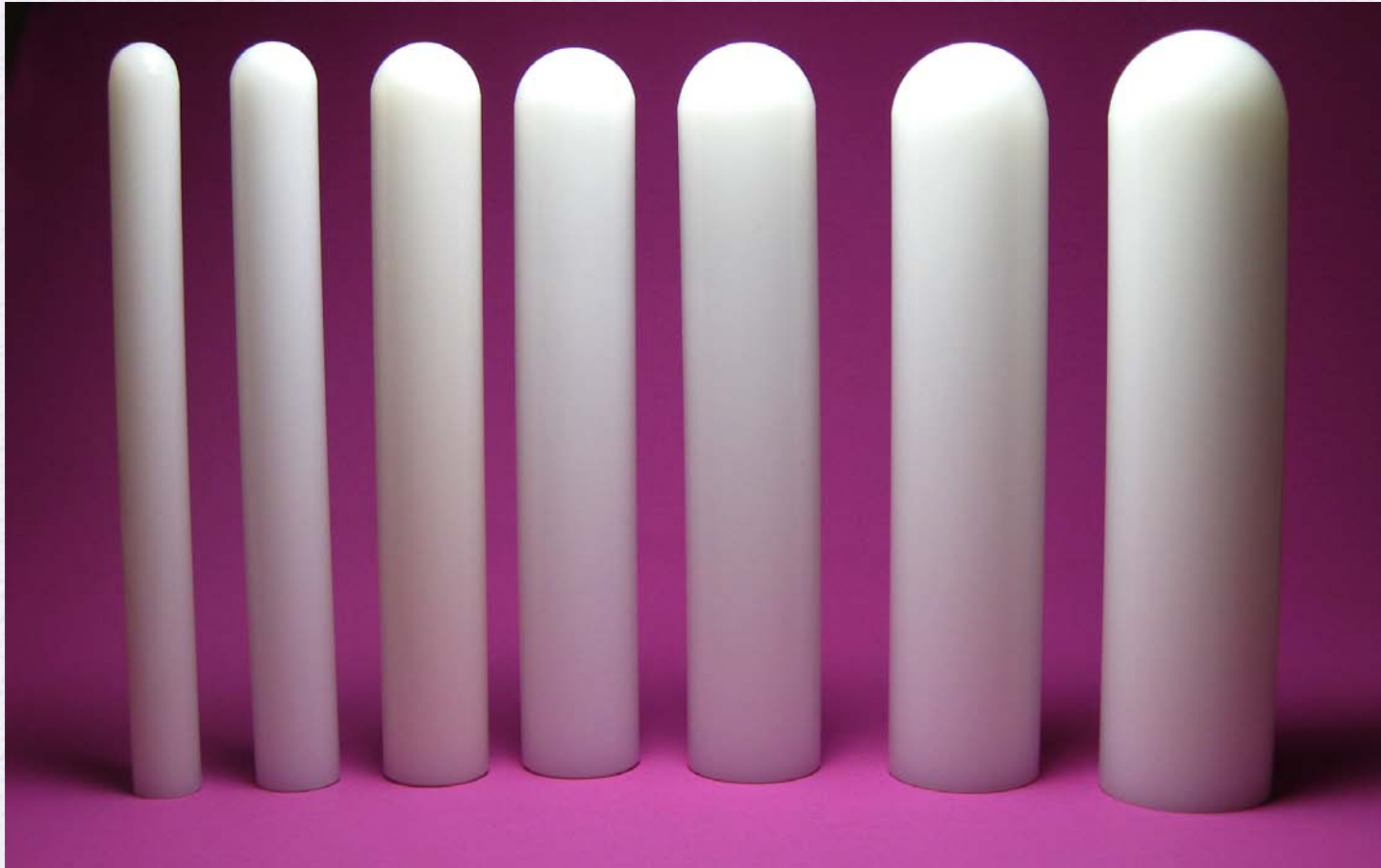
Methods

- Interviews with sexual medicine specialists and pelvic physiotherapists
- Observations of pelvic physiotherapy
- Analysis of interdisciplinary academic, clinical, self help, and grassroots generated literature on chronic sexual pain
- Qualitative interviews with women who identify as having sexual pain

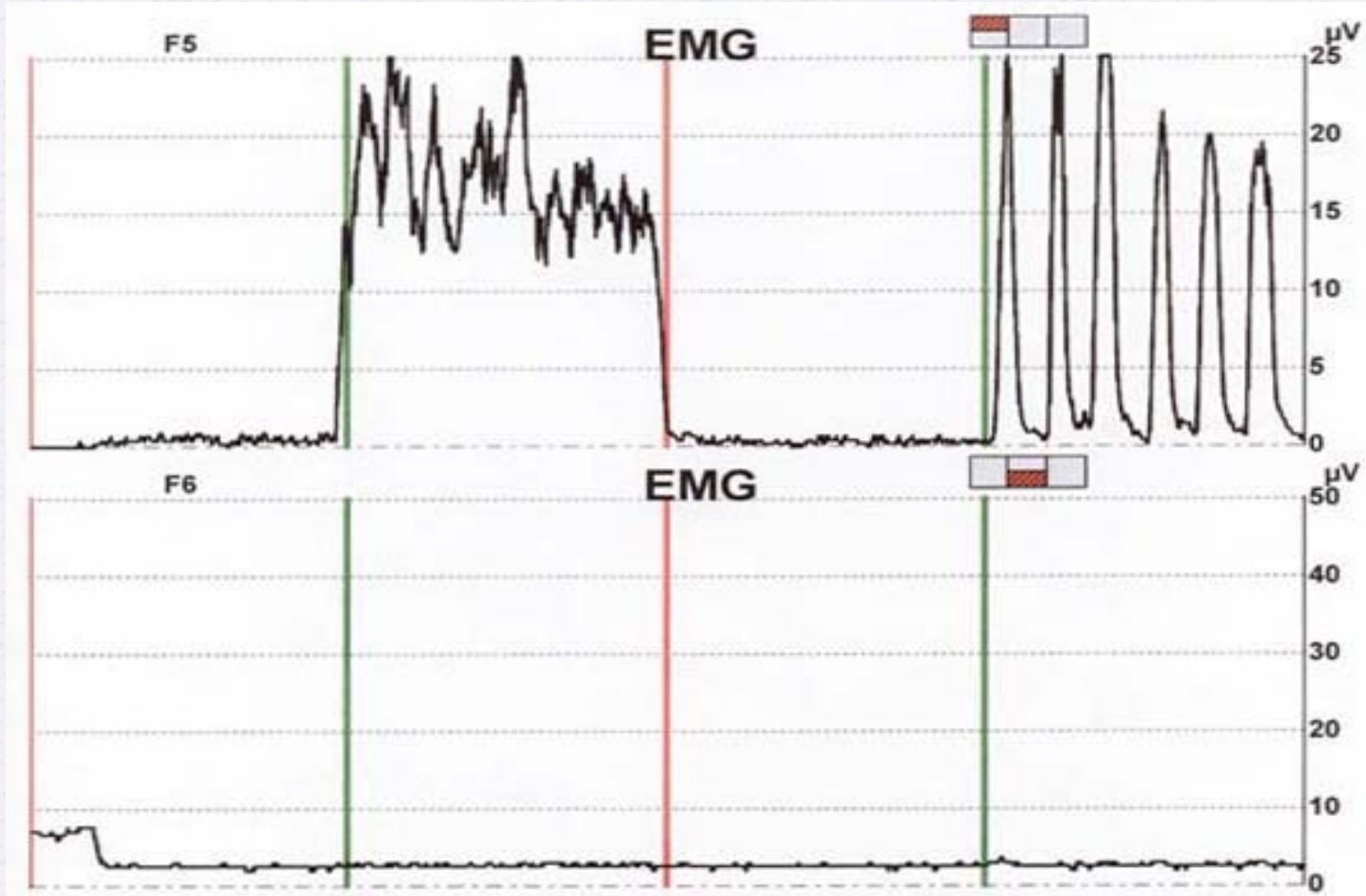
Sexual Medicine



Dilators



Pelvic Physiotherapy



Patient Response: Pros

- The “hands on” attention/ being “taken seriously,” often after being told “it’s all in your head”
- Minimized pain during sexual intercourse
- The power of viewing/ spectatorship
- Increased self-awareness and sense of “control”

Patient Response: Cons

- Inaccessible
- Costly
- Treatments often painful
- Intercourse still at least mildly painful
- Still felt “abnormal,” not “real women”

Empowering Possibilities

- Redefining Sex
- Choosing to engage in sexual practices that do not privilege, require, or culminate in penis-vagina intercourse as the main event
- At times this involved changing partners
- Experience more sexual pleasure and have a more positive self-image as a result

Empowering Possibilities

- Grassroots forums for Self-Desensitizing, Eg. www.vaginismusawareness.com
- Non-profit website talks about “the invisibility in the literature of the women who have actually-self treated on their own despite clear evidence they exist and in great numbers”
- Offers advice/ guidance/ support
- Requires “skill, but professional, not necessarily”
- Brimming with positive reviews by women users

Discussion

- More subtle than the medicalization of FSD generally but:
- Treatments still expensive/ inaccessible
- Professional guidance necessary?
- More invasive treatments in the works, for example, Botox
- Treatments reinforce social norms to the detriment of women's sexual pleasure

Up Next:

