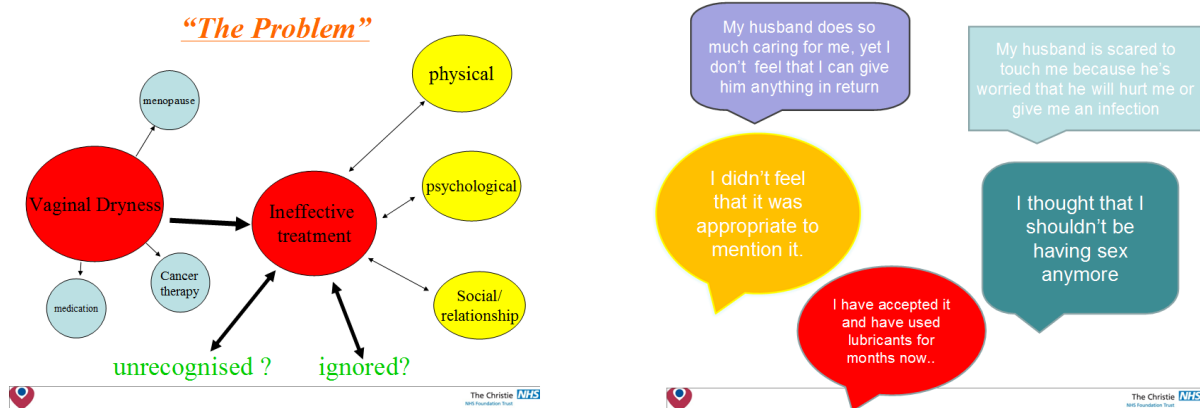


In the afternoon, nurses Angie Leather and Jacqui Stringer, from the Christie Hospital, Manchester, gave an inspiring overview of their work 'Investigating Topical Therapy for Vaginal Dryness'. I say inspiring, because they have designed an intervention which offers comfort and relief to many women, enabling them to resume their loving relationship, and the enjoyment of the comfort and solace this brings to both partners.

Because as many reading this article will know, although often life-saving, the 'costs' of cancer treatment can be felt for many years afterwards in the form of late effects. For example, medications designed to reduce oestrogen production can frequently result in symptoms which resemble those of menopause, most commonly dryness in mucosal tissue, including those of the vagina. Other effects include discomfort passing urine, dry skin, and pain during intercourse, all intimate topics which are very difficult to talk about, and therefore unrecognised and often ignored. The effect on body image and psychological well-being can be very debilitating.

From the slides presented by Angie and Jacqui:



Current treatments include hormone replacement and lubrication, but the first may not be desirable in the context of oestrogen receptor positive breast cancer, while many lubricants are water based and with a high sugar content, which may bring about a susceptibility to thrush and other infections.

After talking to women in their care and seeing the difficulties, Angie and Jacqui designed a pessary based on organic cocoa butter and a mix of high quality essential oils chosen for their particular therapeutic properties, which include the encouragement of normal healthy growth of cells, powerful anti-fungal effects, and anti-bacterial to combat infection. The oils work synergistically - they are more powerful when used together. Cocoa butter has been chosen as it has a history of such use, and melts at body temperature.

The pessaries – which have a nice smell and are pleasant to use - are inserted six nights out of seven, and for three weeks in every four. The feedback from patients has been very positive. There are improvements in quality of life and psychological state, and many women have been able to resume intercourse.

After this initial success, Angie and Jacqui are continuing their work, doing a feasibility study looking at safety, efficacy and user acceptability, with the aim of improving the quality of life of their patients! Breast care consultants are very supportive and the two nurses can see further application in other areas of medicine. We can only wish them great success in their efforts to help us patients return to a normal life after cancer. Thank you to Angie and Jacqui.