



5th to 11th March 2012

Endometriosis Awareness Week 2012

Endometriosis Awareness Week aims to increase knowledge of this common disease by educating teenagers and young women in particular about periods and “what is normal” in a menstrual cycle. Endometriosis affects a large number of women in the UK, however not everyone can recognise the symptoms or knows what to do to get them treated.

1 in 10 women of reproductive age across the UK have endometriosis, equating to over 1 million women. Research conducted by the charity Endometriosis UK shows that it takes an average of 7 years from first developing symptoms to diagnosis. Much of this can be put down to lack of awareness of the condition that affects as many women as arthritis.

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a gynaecological condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb, grows in other areas of the body, most commonly in the pelvic region. This tissue responds to hormones in the same way as the lining of the womb but, with no outlet it can cause inflammation, scarring and adhesions leading to severe pain and many other symptoms.

Possible symptoms of endometriosis

Endometriosis is a very common condition and many women with endometriosis have no symptoms at all. Girls with symptoms of endometriosis can start feeling them as early as their first period but half of those who do experience symptoms and severe period pains in the first few years of menstruation will find this settles down with time. For the remaining 50%, further action may be needed.

Symptoms include but are not limited to:

- * Pelvic pain: painful periods (dysmenorrhoea), pain with sexual intercourse (dyspareunia), chronic pelvic pain
- * Infertility
- * Other non-specific symptoms such as tiredness or specific symptoms related to unusual sites of the endometriosis

A recent publication in Lancet Oncology has shown an association between endometriosis and certain types of ovarian cancer, however most women with endometriosis will not go on to develop ovarian cancer.

Treatment for endometriosis

Management of endometriosis needs to be tailored to the individual. If there are no symptoms then reassurance on its own is likely to be the only treatment required. For those women for whom endometriosis is causing problems, there are many treatment options available. These range from fairly simple medical interventions or laparoscopic surgery to complex major surgery sometimes involving the bowel or the bladder.

To reduce the delay in diagnosis, teenagers and young women need to be made more aware of what is considered normal, of how they can help themselves by recognising symptoms or when they should consult a specialist for treatment.