

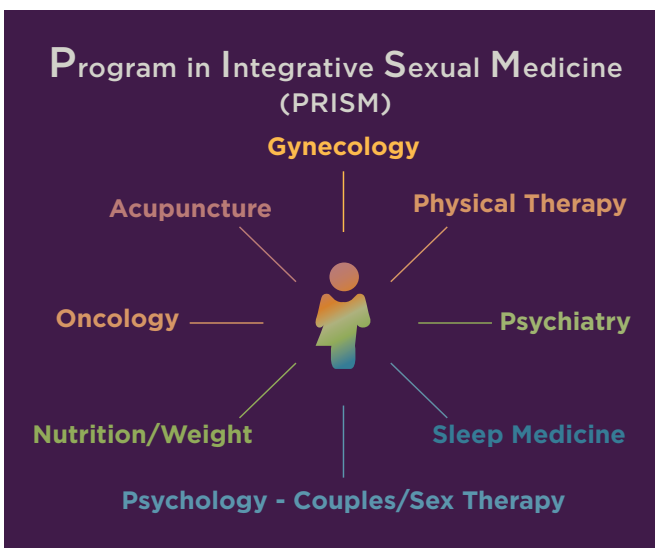
## BRIEFINGS FROM **WOMEN'S HEALTH EXPERTS**

# Have a Therapeutic Moment with a Patient Who Raises a Sexual Function Concern

The University of Chicago Medicine Program in Integrative Sexual Medicine (PRISM) offers personalized care for patients seeking to maintain or restore sexual function affected by aging, cancer and other common chronic conditions. Since 2008, we have served hundreds of patients across the spectrum of cancer types, including breast, gynecologic, leukemia and lymphoma, colorectal, head and neck and others seeking to regain sexual function after cancer and treatment.

### The PRISM approach

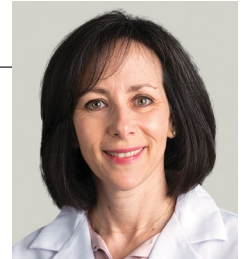
Our approach to caring for patients with sexual function concerns is driven by the patient's goals and priorities. Our work is interdisciplinary and collaborative. We work with oncologists to ensure a treatment plan that fits with the patient's cancer care. We also collaborate with experts, across the hospital and throughout the Chicagoland area, in a variety of disciplines including pelvic floor physical therapy, psychiatry, acupuncture, community-based human and social service providers and other professionals and resources. Our goal is to deliver whole person care for sexual function and related problems.



*The Program in Integrative Sexual Medicine (PRISM) approach to sexual medicine places the patient at the center of a collaborative, interdisciplinary plan of care.*

**by Stacy Tessler Lindau, MD, MAPP**

*Director of the Program in Integrative Sexual Medicine (PRISM)  
 Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Medicine Geriatrics*



### The therapeutic moment

Every healthcare provider can have a therapeutic moment with a patient who presents with sexual function concerns. There is no role for profiling—the best available evidence says that most patients, across every age group and across a wide range of health conditions, value their sexuality and want their physician to address this aspect of health. A positive and normalizing question like: “Are you satisfied with your sexual function?” or “Is your sex life pleasurable?” can signal to a patient that sexual function is a normal part of human function that should be satisfying and pleasurable. If the answer is “no” we can help!

### How do you screen for sexual function concerns?

Simple tools are available to screen your patients for sexual function concerns, like adding a single item “concerns about sexual function” to an intake checklist or adding the validated checklist screener below to your patient assessment.

In the past 12 months, has there ever been a period of 3 months or more when you had any of the following problems or concerns? Check all that apply.

- You wanted to feel more interest in sexual activity.
- Your vagina felt too dry
- You had pain during or after sexual activity
- You had difficulty having an orgasm
- You felt anxious about sexual activity
- You did not enjoy sexual activity
- Some other sexual problem or concern
- No sexual problems or concerns

*Recommended checklist screener to assess for sexual concerns in women. Flynn, JGIM, 30(10), 2015x*

(continued from page 1)

If you screen a patient for a sexual function concern, or if a patient has the courage to bring it up themselves, here are some tips on what to say and do to ensure that they feel that their concern will be capably addressed:

- (1) I see you have a concern about your sexual function.
- (2) You are not alone—problems like this are common among patients with cancer.
- (3) Would you like to see a specialist?
- (4) Refer to PRISM clinic, if applicable.

### Who should be referred?

Before coming to PRISM, patients with sexual function problems due to an untreated gynecologic condition, chronic pain, mood or other condition should address these primary issues first. While many patients with sexual function concerns after cancer also have symptoms like stress, anxiety or other mood issues, most sexual function problems do have a physical basis. Be careful not to suggest “it’s in your head” or “you just need to relax.” A patient will tell you if they think their problem is mainly due to their relationship or a mood issue. But sexual function problems after cancer treatment are commonly iatrogenic—the result of cancer care.

At PRISM, we care for anyone who identifies as a person who would benefit from a gynecologic approach to addressing sexual function problems

- » people with cancer
- » people with elevated cancer risk
- » people with a partner affected by cancer
- » people without cancer who are in the care of a general gynecology professional or another healthcare professional who provides routine gynecologic screening and care

### How do I make a referral?

For providers in the UCM system, referrals to the PRISM clinic can be made in Epic by typing Outpatient Consult to PRISM Clinic in the “Orders” window. All providers can refer patients by giving us a call at **773-702-6118**.

### What should a patient expect for their visit to the PRISM clinic?

Initial consultation with the PRISM clinic consists of an hour-long visit which involves:

- » Self-completed sexual function assessment (completed prior to the visit)
- » Intake assessment with our experienced nurse (completed by phone before the visit)
- » A detailed medical, social, and sexual history
- » An educational session curated to each patient’s unique needs and delivered by a patient educator
- » A treatment plan
- » Communication with others on the patient’s care team, if the patient wishes

Depending on the treatment plan, we may refer a patient to one of our many expert collaborators for other supportive services such as pelvic floor physical therapy, individual psychotherapy, sex therapy or couples therapy. We may also recommend self-care activities, such as vaginal self-dilation. We typically see patients for three to five visits. Most patients prefer that we keep referring professionals informed of their progress, but in some cases they ask that our evaluation and treatment plans are handled privately. We, of course, respect the patient’s wishes.

We have established a web-based platform to educate people and healthcare professionals about how to preserve and recover sexual function. This platform is maintained by Dr. Lindau and her colleagues at the University of Chicago. Please visit [WomanLab.org](http://WomanLab.org) for more information and access to a variety of video and text materials designed to answer your questions about sexual function and treatment for sexual function concerns. Follow us on Twitter: [@WomanLab\\_](https://twitter.com/WomanLab_) and Facebook: [@WeAreWomanLab](https://www.facebook.com/WeAreWomanLab).

For more information about PRISM, please visit: [UChicagoMedicine.org/prism](http://UChicagoMedicine.org/prism).

To schedule a patient, e-mail us at [womenshealth@uchospitals.edu](mailto:womenshealth@uchospitals.edu)

Refer patients by calling **773-702-6118**

Visit [UChicagoMedicine.org/prism](http://UChicagoMedicine.org/prism) to learn more.



AT THE FOREFRONT

**UChicago  
Medicine**

## PROGRAM IN INTEGRATIVE SEXUAL MEDICINE

Referrals and consultations  
Call 773-702-6118

### LOCATION

**Hyde Park**  
Duchossois Center for  
Advanced Medicine (DCAM)  
5841 S. Maryland Ave.  
Third Floor  
Chicago, IL 60637



We provide care for all people,  
of all genders and sexual  
identities, who feel a gynecologic  
approach to sexual medicine  
would be of benefit.

For more information,  
please visit

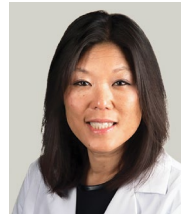
[UChicagoMedicine.org/prism](http://UChicagoMedicine.org/prism)



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