

Case Report

SANITARY NAPKINS SHOULD BE MADE AFFORDABLE

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INTRODUCTION

Sanitary napkins have very low penetration in India, partly due to un-affordability and partly due to use of unhygienic old cloth pieces.^{1,2} As a result they suffer from infections. This is due to lack of awareness and economic inability for adopting better precautions like use of good sanitary napkins during menstruation period. Usually different varieties of sanitary napkins are found available in the market but they are very expensive and are not affordable for rural & underprivileged women and girls. The author has witnessed several materials which a woman used during menstruation to prevent soiling of clothes.

CASE 1

The patient a 32 year old lady came in Gynecology OPD with complaints of excessive bleeding per vaginal. Her general condition was good. On PV examination her uterus was normal in size firm mobile but the fornices were tender with slight bleeding per vaginum. What caught the authors' attention was the piece of cloth filled with sand which she was trying to fold and use as a sanitary napkin. When enquired about it she said that this is the general practice in their village and most of the women use it during their monthly period. When explained about the consequences of such practice it felt on deaf ears and she just left.

CASE 2

This patient 28 year old married female with two full term normal delivery came to the OPD with complaints of fever, pain lower abdomen and vaginal itching and foul smell for 2 days. On general examination she was febrile, with pulse rate 100/min. Per Abdominal examination there was slight tenderness in lower abdomen. There was no guarding. On P/V examination there was unhealthy discharge from vagina and deep in fornix a slipper material was felt which was taken out by holding through Allis forceps. It turned out to be a small polythene bag which the patient confessed that she had inserted 20 days back during the onset of unexpected menstruation. She totally forgot about it. She was given parental antibiotics and local antibacterial vaginal tablet. She recovered fully and discharged on third day. On taking a history of napkin use we discovered that she could not afford napkins but always used a cloth which was not available this time.

DISCUSSION

These are not an isolated instance of women resorting to a random object for soaking the menstrual flow. Women have used linen, fiber and other materials for millennia. In Rajasthan, India, the menstrual cycle is referred to as 'kapda' or 'kapad' in the vernacular which translated to 'cloth' in English. Since a cloth is used to soak the bleeding, the Hindi word for cloth is used to designate the menstrual cycle. Any available rag or its substitute is used for the purpose which is unhygienic to say the least.

The most striking fact in the current case is that the woman had to use a plastic bag **because she could not afford** to buy sanitary pads. This brings an important question to the forefront: what can be done to ensure guaranteed personal hygiene to all women irrespective of their ability to pay for it? The answer is already available.....stares us in the eye. We only have to implement it.

The GOI and other NGO's have excellent programme operating in the area of reproductive health. The govt. distributed 2.8 million condoms free of charge in 2011 alone [2] all over India. This exercise itself incurs an expense to the exchequer but its money well spent on a good programme. Is it not prudent to start a free sanitary napkin distribution programme? There have been reports of pilot programme of this nature in the media with irregular implementation, equivocal results and indeterminate outcomes If free distribution is not pragmatic, and I don't see the reason why it should be so, then heavily subsidized sanitary napkins should be available to the poor so that everyone can afford to buy them. This will ensure good penetration of a hygienic practice and help reduce morbidity associated with unhygienic practices and ensure good menstrual health.

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