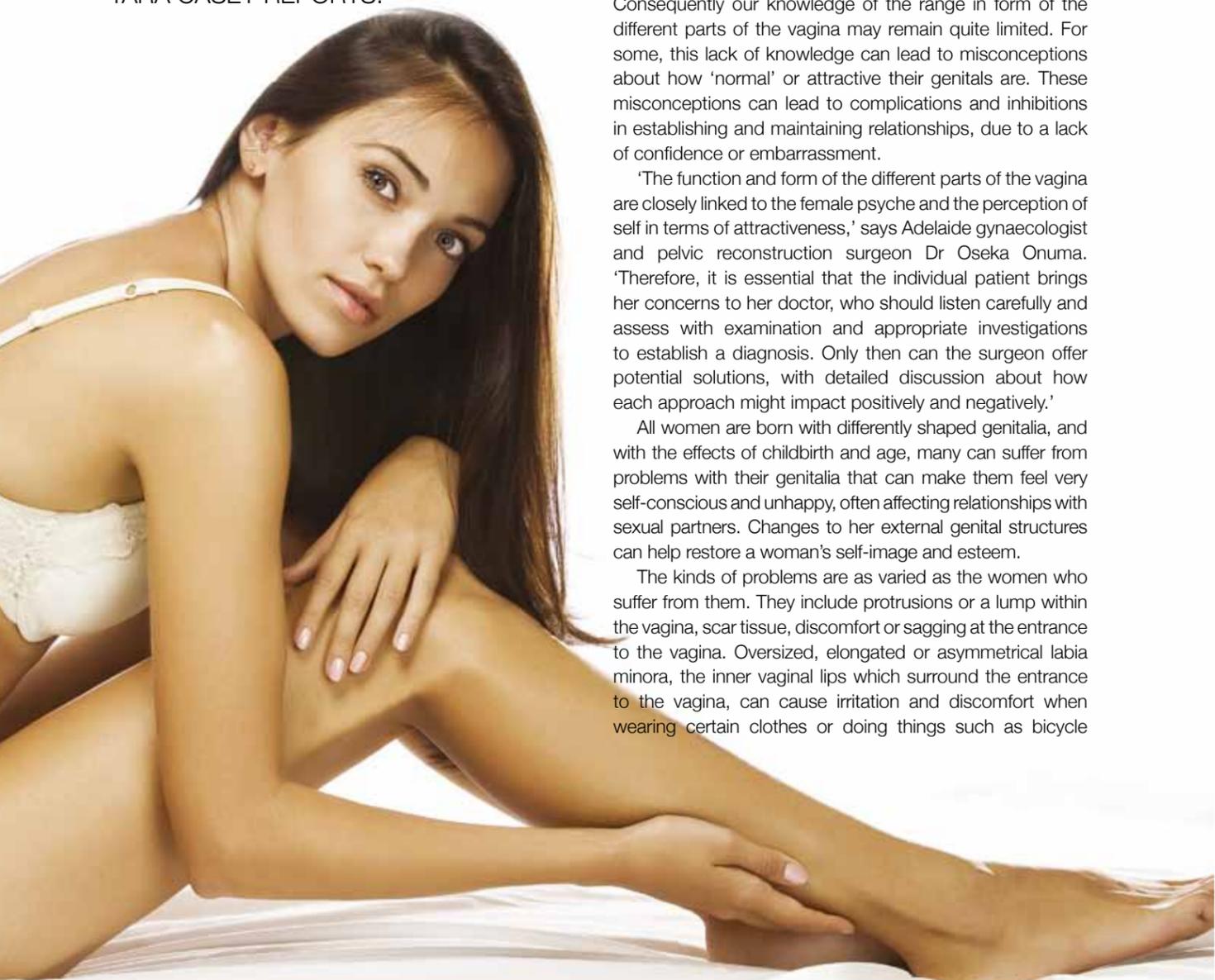




genital surgery

in complete *confidence*

ADELAIDE GYNAECOLOGIST AND PELVIC RECONSTRUCTION SURGEON **DR OSEKA ONUMA** DISCUSSES THE OFTEN RESERVED ISSUES SURROUNDING FEMALE GENITALIA. TARA CASEY REPORTS.



Many of us are reticent to openly talk about the so-called 'embarrassing areas' of our bodies, so one of the least talked about areas of cosmetic surgery is that available for the female genitalia. Unlike our male counterparts, whose locker-room experiences have allowed them to gauge where they stand next to other males, few women have the opportunity to compare notes. Consequently our knowledge of the range in form of the different parts of the vagina may remain quite limited. For some, this lack of knowledge can lead to misconceptions about how 'normal' or attractive their genitals are. These misconceptions can lead to complications and inhibitions in establishing and maintaining relationships, due to a lack of confidence or embarrassment.

'The function and form of the different parts of the vagina are closely linked to the female psyche and the perception of self in terms of attractiveness,' says Adelaide gynaecologist and pelvic reconstruction surgeon Dr Oseka Onuma. 'Therefore, it is essential that the individual patient brings her concerns to her doctor, who should listen carefully and assess with examination and appropriate investigations to establish a diagnosis. Only then can the surgeon offer potential solutions, with detailed discussion about how each approach might impact positively and negatively.'

All women are born with differently shaped genitalia, and with the effects of childbirth and age, many can suffer from problems with their genitalia that can make them feel very self-conscious and unhappy, often affecting relationships with sexual partners. Changes to her external genital structures can help restore a woman's self-image and esteem.

The kinds of problems are as varied as the women who suffer from them. They include protrusions or a lump within the vagina, scar tissue, discomfort or sagging at the entrance to the vagina. Oversized, elongated or asymmetrical labia minora, the inner vaginal lips which surround the entrance to the vagina, can cause irritation and discomfort when wearing certain clothes or doing things such as bicycle

and horse riding, or during sexual intercourse. Loose or weak vaginal muscles, mainly caused through the muscles stretching during childbirth, can cause problems for some women and their sexual partners during intercourse.

Another problem may be female stress urinary incontinence, caused predominantly by an improperly functioning urethra. When a woman suffers from stress urinary incontinence, weakened muscle and pelvic tissue don't support the urethra adequately. As a result, the urethra doesn't maintain a tight seal during exercise or other movement such as coughing or laughing, and urine escapes.

'In addressing any problem, it is crucial to ascertain what is really bothering the patient,' he says. 'I never make assumptions as the real problem may be more subtle than the one being expressed. I want to know not only the symptoms but also the length of time they have been endured and how her quality of life is being affected. After a thorough examination, the correlation of the clinical findings with the symptoms results in higher success rates – both in terms of the surgery and patient satisfaction.'

☞ **The kinds of genital problems are as varied as the women who suffer from them** ☞

There is now a range of surgical options available which can address and hopefully resolve these problems. Laser reduction labioplasty can sculpt the elongated or unequal labial minora as desired. Dr Onuma says, 'Labioplasty techniques can also reconstruct conditions that are a result of the ageing process, childbirth trauma or injury. The procedure can provide a more youthful and aesthetically appealing vulva. The vulvar structures (including the labia minora, labia majora, mons pubis, perineum, entrance to the vagina and hymen) can be surgically enhanced, both functionally and aesthetically.'

Laser vaginal rejuvenation can enhance vaginal muscle tone, strength and control. Laser techniques enhance precision-reliant procedures with controlled accuracy and typically result in rapid healing, less pain and faster recovery.

The tensionless vaginal tape, or TVT, sling is a minimally invasive procedure during which a Prolene tape sling is inserted to correct stress urinary incontinence. 'The Prolene mesh is inserted through the vagina and positioned underneath the urethra, creating a supportive sling, which is held in place by surrounding tissues rather than sutured into position. During movement, the mesh supports the urethra, allowing it to maintain its seal to prevent urine loss.'

'No woman should suffer embarrassment or feel inhibited in her relationship with her partner due to the appearance of her vagina or physical sexual dysfunction,' Dr Onuma says. 'Engaging in a frank discussion with her gynaecologist is the first step to alleviating her anxieties.' **acsm**

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- Aesthetic and functional labial surgery
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- Restoring pelvic support
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To empower women with knowledge, choice and alternatives



Dr Oseka Onuma

BSc MJur MBBS MRCOG FRANZCOG
Gynaecologist & Pelvic Reconstructive Surgeon



Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Institute of Adelaide

Robe Terrace Specialist Centre Suite 4 Robe Terrace, Medindie South Australia 5081

Phone **08 8344 6085**

Facsimile 08 8344 6087

Email rooms@dronuma.com

www.dronuma.com