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QUALITY OF LIFE IN WOMEN OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE WITH RECURRENT GENITAL HERPES

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ABSTRACT — **BACKGROUND:** Current statistics show that the highest incidence of genital herpes is observed among women of reproductive age. Since these patients have an active lifestyle, frequent outbreaks of genital herpes can cause physical and psychological discomfort.

AIM. To assess the quality of life of women of reproductive age with recurrent genital herpes.

METHODS: The quality of life in women suffering from recurrent genital herpes for more than 5 years (n=86) was evaluated. The control group included healthy women (n=91) according to the data of external genitalia examination and PCR diagnostics. The Health Status Survey (SF-36) in points was employed to measure the health status of women in both groups.

RESULTS: We established a significant difference between two groups of patients in terms of the influence of the following indicators on functional limitations: general health condition — 12.1±0.8 points; pain — 8.3±0.4 points; physical problems — 18.3±3.7; physical activity — 8.2±0.6 points (p<0.01).

CONCLUSION: Symptoms of herpetic infection and long-term persistence have an impact on the performance of daily tasks and the quality of life of the patient.

KEYWORDS — Genital Herpes, quality of life, pain, physical activity.

INTRODUCTION

Today, herpes simplex virus is one of the most common human viral infections [1]. According to blood serum studies, in 80% of the adult population, antibodies to the herpes simplex virus are detected [2], and in 6-10% of patients, herpetic infection is accompanied by clinical manifestations.

Over the past 10–15 years, the number of registered patients with genital herpes in Russia has increased 2–2.5 times, with the highest incidence

observed in the age group under 30 years [3]. Often recurrent genital herpes presents a serious medical and social problem in women of reproductive age, as it poses a powerful psychotrauma that limits their social activities, worsens the quality of life, and affects a reproductive health.

Recently, the question of the quality of life in patients with recurrent genital herpes has become increasingly important [4]. It is known that this category of patients is concerned not only with the physical suffering from a relapse of the disease. The psychological, social and psychosocial impact of herpes on their lives is much more painful for these patients. Low self-esteem and self-respect, depression, anger, guilt, and sexual problems create a vicious circle for patients with genital herpes and significantly reduce the quality of life.

Aim:

to assess the quality of life in women of reproductive age with recurrent genital herpes.

METHODS

We evaluated the quality of life in women suffering from recurrent genital herpes for more than 5 years (n=86), who made up the first group of the study. The second (control) group included healthy women according to the examination of the external genitalia and PCR diagnostics (n=91). We evaluated the quality of life of women in both groups using the Health Status Survey (SF-36) in points. Using the SF-36 questionnaire, we took into account the following indicators: physical and social activity; general and mental health; vitality; the role of pain, physical and emotional problems in life restriction (LR). Women who had genital herpes disease less than 5 years were excluded from the study, as well as those with a detected papillomavirus infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Statistical analysis was performed using spreadsheets "EXCEL" and "STATISTICA 8.0". Statistical processing was carried out with the calculation of arithmetic mean values (M) and their errors (m). Differences were considered significant at p < 0.05.

RESULTS

Women of both groups were comparable in age:

26.8±6.2 years in the first group, 24.6±5.8 years in the second group ($p>0.05$). The majority of women in the first group complained of burning sensation (90.6%), itching (95.3%), rash in the form of small bubbles (83.7%), dyspareunia (38.3%). The duration of chronic genital herpes in women of the first group was 9.2±3.1 years. A comparison of the quality of life in women of both groups according to the SF-36 questionnaire is shown in Fig. 1.

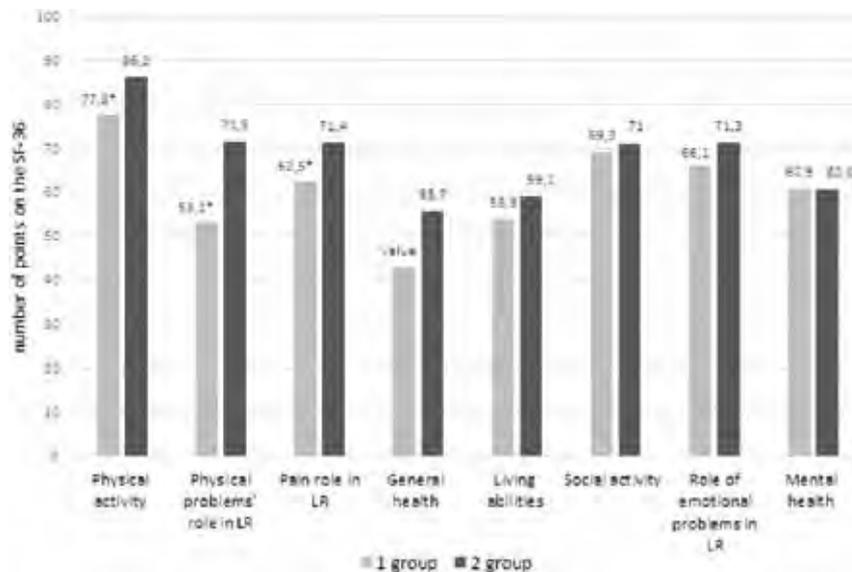


Fig. 1. Comparison of the quality of life in women of both groups according to the SF-36 questionnaire

* $p < 0.01$ indicators of the first group in relation to the second.

In patients who have recurrent genital herpes for more than 5 years, the greatest difference with the control group was in the parameter *the influence of physical problems on functional limitations*, which was 18.3±3.7 points ($p < 0.01$). That is, there is a clear relationship between disease duration and quality of life (satisfaction with their physical abilities).

We also obtained a significant difference in the indicators of general health, the influence of physical activity and painful sensations on functional limitations by 12.1±0.8, 8.2±0.6, 8.3±0.4 accordingly. Consequently, the symptoms of a herpetic infection and the duration of the disease have an impact on the performance of everyday activities.

DISCUSSION

Recurrent genital herpes is one of the socially significant challenges in the practice of a gynecologist. Outbreaks of genital herpes can contribute to the development of chronic inflammatory urological diseases, and increase the risk of developing cervical cancer [3]. Moreover, the herpetic infection itself and persistent microflora contribute to the development of secondary symptoms: difficult and painful urina-

tion, the formation of chronic recurrent diseases of the lower urinary tract, up to the formation of paraurethral cysts and abscesses [2, 5, 6].

Also, many experts emphasise that in recent years, the percentage of people with depression and anxiety associated with chronic herpetic infection has increased. According to Royer H. R. et al., 95% of patients have depression, and 90% indicate concern about sexual disorders [7]. And, 15% of women believe

that the infection with herpes may lead to death [7]. Some studies show that even primary serological imaging of the herpes virus may cause stress in patients [1]. Our observation demonstrates that the deterioration in the quality of life of patients with genital herpes is determined by the duration of the disease. The disease burden for more than five years leads to a change in adaptation to life with the disease, up to acceptance of obvious physical limitations.

Recently, the antiviral therapy is the most common treatment option for recurrent herpes infection. However, it should be remembered that antiviral chemotherapy drugs only suppress the active replication of the herpes virus, causing clinical remission, and do not affect the frequency of relapses. Unfortunately, frequent relapses of genital herpes cause physical and psychological discomfort, which leads to a decrease in the patient's quality of life.

CONCLUSION

Duration of recurrent genital herpes for more than five years significantly reduces the quality of life of patients, both physically and psychosocially. In the treatment of recurrent genital herpes, it is necessary to

take into account not only the effectiveness of therapeutic measures, but also psychological adaptation among women.

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