



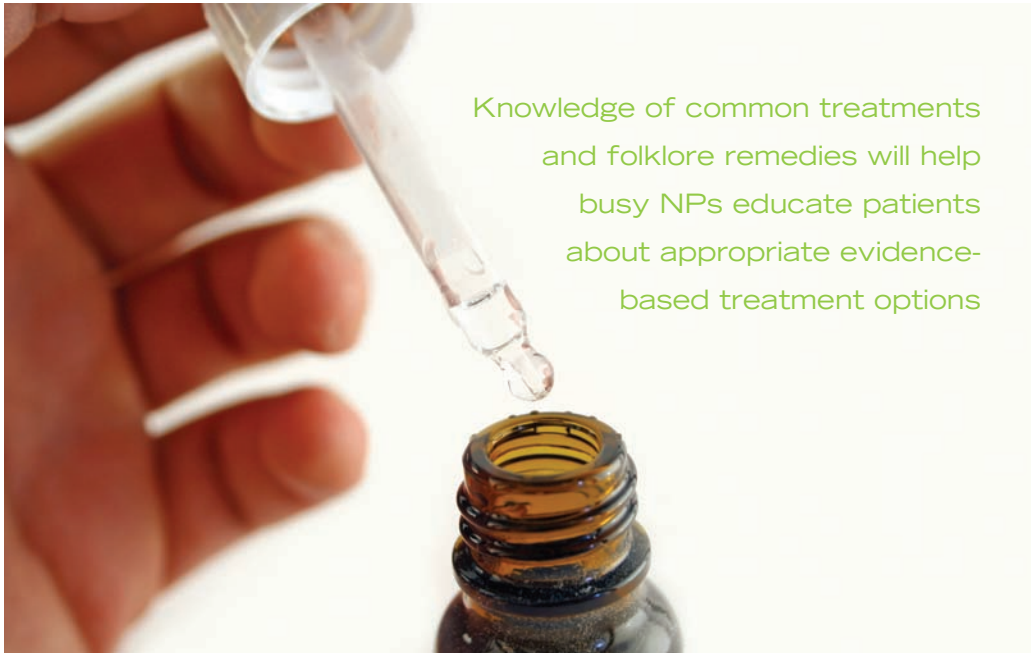
Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself

An Educational Campaign About Vaginitis
in the Dominican Republic

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Cien Fuegos, an area of Santiago, Dominican Republic, is a community of extreme poverty, poor living accommodations, lack of resources and unsanitary conditions. On a recent medical mission trip to Cien Fuegos, we became aware while working in the mission clinic that use of folklore and self-treatment of vaginal symptoms was common. Douching with white vinegar is the most commonly used remedy. Women rely on neighbors or friends advice for treatment of

common problems. They don't question if an unidentified pill, tea or liquid potion is given to them to use in the vagina. Based on our experience, a literature review (CINAHL, EBSCO, MedLine and PubMed) and interviews with community physicians and mission clinic patients from the Dominican Republic, it became apparent that patient education and trust in health care providers could help foster a decrease in the incidence of problematic vaginal infections (physician interviews were essential, as there are no advanced practice nurses in



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Santiago). Previous mission clinics and relationships developed in Cien Fuegos have paved the way within the community to provide a trusting relationship with the health care providers in the mission clinic. Residents feel they are very lucky and blessed to be the recipients of care provided by volunteers from a Christian-based mission (Barnabas Task). The Dominican women trust the local physicians but lack the financial resources to make office visits possible.

The Problem

Vaginitis is a problem worldwide (Secor, 2011), and women around the world may benefit from community-centered, evidence-based education that teaches basic hygiene, safe sex practices and women's rights. In fulfillment of a final capstone project for a Master of Science in Nursing degree, author Gura and fellow graduate student, Candice Campbell, RN, developed an educational module entitled *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself*. The inspiration for the module title came from multiple assessments of the culture and behavior of Dominican women. Although the program title has been widely cited in various fields in literature from 1840 to 2011, the need for self-respect, empowerment and self-protection was clearly evident in Cien Fuegos, thus prompting the use of those terms in the program title. The module focuses on issues of vaginal hygiene, vaginitis, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and women's rights. This

module is intended to be sent to Cien Fuegos and implemented in a women's group at a local church. Although this module was prepared for the women of Cien Fuegos, this information could be adapted for women of other cultures.

About Vaginitis

Vaginal infections are a frequent gynecologic complaint, accounting for more than 10 million office visits a year (Van Kessel, Assefi, Marrazzo, & Eckert, 2003). Nurse practitioners (NPs) often see patients in the clinical setting who present with symptoms of candidiasis, bacterial vaginosis and trichomoniasis. Knowledge of common treatments and folklore remedies will help busy NPs educate patients about appropriate evidence-based treatment options.

Causes and Risk Factors

Vaginitis can affect women of all ages, race and cultures. Vaginitis is defined as an irritation and/or inflammation of the vagina (Hillard, 2008). Bacteria, fungus, protozoa and allergens are all causes of vaginitis. Bubble baths, soaps, vaginal contraceptives, laundry detergents, feminine sprays and perfumes may contribute to irritation in the genital area (Vorvick, Storck, & Zieve, 2010). The estrogen-depleted vaginal cells of postmenopausal women result in dryness, vulvar irritation and itching. Box 1 lists the three most common types of vaginitis, as well as symptoms, diagnosis and treatment.

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