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Female circumcision: Its effect on the sexual and reproductive health of women

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The innovative nurse led African Women's Clinic (AWC) at The Women's' Hospital in Melbourne, Australia provides a safe and confidential place that women can discuss their female circumcision in a supportive environment. One of the main discussions is around their sexual and reproductive health. We provide counseling and support for women affected by female circumcision. In this clinic we discuss all aspects of the woman's health and offer de infibulation in the clinic as an outpatient under local anesthetic. Changing practice environments have seen a transition from care in the operating theatre with a specialist gynecologist to a nurse lead self-referral service in a women's health clinic. The AWC was established after a thorough review of available evidence about patient outcomes in nurse led services worldwide. The AWC provides information to empower women, their partners, families and the broader community to raise awareness of the impact of female circumcision on women's health. Community awareness of the clinic and demand for the services provided is reflected in increasing booking numbers as well as direct verbal and anecdotal reports of patient satisfaction. Women are encouraged to return to the clinic for a review appointment four weeks after the procedure. As the clinic has become better known young women are increasingly likely to present for consultation earlier, prior to their first sexual relationship or at least early in pregnancy. Where indicated specialist physiotherapy consultation and sexual counseling are provided. Screening for sexually transmitted infections and cervical screening is also offered.

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