Outpatient Management of Bartholin’s Abscess/Cyst

Department of Gynaecology
Why have I been given this leaflet?

You have been diagnosed as having a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess and you have been counselled regarding the treatment options for this condition. This leaflet is to answer any questions you might have regarding your treatment.

What is the Bartholin’s gland?

Bartholin’s glands are a pair of glands that are on either side of the vagina. Each gland is the size of a pea. These glands keep the vagina moist by producing a small amount of mucus like fluid. These glands produce lubrication during sex.

How did I get a Cyst or Abscess in this gland?

1. Sometimes the thin passage (duct) between the gland and the vagina gets blocked. The secretion produced by the gland accumulates and you get a cyst (swelling). This could vary in size.

2. Sometimes a cyst can become infected and the cyst turns into an abscess. An abscess is a collection of pus that can occur with an infection.
What problems does a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess cause?

You may have a lump in the vagina which may be painful on sitting or when you have sex.

The area can look red swollen, feel hot to touch and you may find it uncomfortable to pass urine.

What treatment options are available?

Sometimes cysts or abscesses can drain by themselves (i.e. they can burst, with pus or discharge coming out). This is more likely to happen if you apply a hot compress – a towel/flannel soaked with hot water and applied to the cyst or abscess.

Sometimes abscesses can be treated with antibiotics, which will treat the infection, but may not stop you getting another infection in the future.

If the cyst or abscess is very painful, or if antibiotics have not resolved the problem, then you require a procedure to drain the cyst or abscess.
What does the procedure involve?

In order to drain your cyst or abscess a catheter is inserted into the abscess/cyst, this drains the fluid in order to stop the cyst or abscess coming back. The procedure can be done in the Gynaecology Assessment Unit on Level 11 and requires no preparation.

A small amount of local anaesthetic is injected via a tiny needle into the cyst or abscess. A hole is made to drain the fluid away. A short rubber tube, called a catheter, is placed inside the gland and the balloon at the end of the catheter is inflated in order to keep the catheter in place. The catheter remains in the gland so that the hole stays open permanently, even when the catheter is removed. The catheter is designed to stay in for up to 4-6 weeks, but sometimes falls out before this. If the catheter falls out in the first 2 weeks, please contact L11- Gynae Assessment Unit for advice/re assessment.
What does this catheter mean for my normal activities?

The catheter should not interfere with usual activities. Most women can go about their work and exercise with no problem. It will not prevent you swimming. Some women have sex with the catheter there, but others prefer to avoid sex until the catheter is removed. For convenience, the end of the catheter can be tucked inside the vagina.

What follow up will I get?

If the catheter has not fallen out after 4-6 weeks please contact the Gynaecology Assessment Unit on L11 on the number below and we will make an appointment for it to be removed.

Occasionally the catheter may fall out early, before 4-6 weeks. Please do not worry if this happens, no further treatment will be required.

What alternatives are there?

The alternatives to the procedure in the clinic are having either the same procedure under a general anaesthetic or a slightly different procedure called ‘marsupialisation’ under general anaesthetic. Marsupialisation avoids having the catheter left in, but may have a slightly greater risk of the problem coming back. Abscesses tend to be extremely painful and tender.
Who can I contact if I have any concerns or questions?

Royal Sussex County Hospital
Level 11- Gynaecology Ward/Assessment Unit:
01237 523191
If you require this document in a language other than English please inform your interpreter or a member of staff.

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The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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