



what's going on
down there?

'What's Going On Down There?'

Developing a website to raise awareness
about bacterial vaginosis

www.wgodt.com.au

- Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection affecting women of reproductive age ^{1,2}
- Affects up to 1 in 3 women in developed nations
- Increased risk HIV & STIs, PID, miscarriage, preterm delivery, low birth weight babies & pp endometritis ³⁻⁵

- Symptoms – ‘fishy’ like odour/thin milky white discharge
- Recurrence is common – up to 60% <12 mnths⁶
- Cause of BV is still unclear – sexually transmitted?

Symptoms have a significant impact⁷

... I guess once it happens I don't want to have sex, um, it also affects my self-esteem. Or well my sexual confidence I guess ... I don't know how to explain it, I guess it just puts me off wanting to be intimate (Wendy, age 42).

...it's a problem because I know I can smell it even when I have my legs firmly closed or when I cross my legs or... I'm very aware of the fact that it's there, so if I change my legs from being crossed one way, changing them and crossing the other, I can smell the smell so strongly... (Laura, age 38).

- Women know about thrush – few know about BV⁸
- Many women mistreat themselves with OTC thrush medications
- Delaying appropriate treatment can increase risk of BV associated complications

AIMS

- 1) Explore women's online health seeking behaviours at the time of their diagnosis of thrush or BV
- 2) Develop a website about common vaginal infections which meets women's design and content needs and helps raise their awareness of bacterial vaginosis

METHODS

10 women diagnosed with BV or thrush at MSHC

Face to face or telephone interviews about:

- online health seeking behaviours time diagnosis
- views on website content and design
- key search terms used

Interviews 20-45 minutes, recorded & transcribed

Data independently analysed by both:

- research team
- web-development company (Splendid Studio)

Used to define 3 typical personas or users

Ivy



THE ADVOCATE

[This persona is a result of interviewees that spoke about self-empowerment and alternative therapies when it comes to women's health, it is unclear at this stage, as to whether this persona is a customer or an advocate for the site, or other.]

Ivy is 33 years old, and CEO of her own Start Up. She is currently single but enjoying dating Robert, and getting to know him better.

Ivy is not a stranger to women's health concerns and the often confusing and worrying vaginal symptoms women commonly experience.

She approaches sexual health issues like any other health issue and has taken it upon herself to build confidence with her wellbeing, research conditions and approach them as holistically as possible.

Having done her research and armed with a sound understanding of women's health conditions, possible diagnosis and treatment, Ivy is confident to have a constructive conversation with health professionals.

Ivy is an advocate for working with health professionals to find more acceptable and holistic approaches to the treatment of vaginal conditions such as BV and thrush.

CONCERNS

- That women aren't being tested correctly or taken seriously when it comes to their symptoms and concerns.
- There isn't enough alternative health options and information on ongoing research for treatments.

GOALS

- Be an advocate and support to women by encouraging them to educate themselves on all types of women's health issues, their condition types and treatments.
- Encourage women to seek out medical specialists and take their checklists of needs with them.
- Encourage women to seek as many opinions as needed if the first doctors are not cooperative or refuse testing requests.
- Champion natural and alternative therapies to enhance general wellbeing.

"SELF CARE AND LOVE IS IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN WHEN THEY ARE UNWELL"

Ivy – The Advocate – single, dating, advocate for women's health, educates herself about women's health issues and is looking to have a constructive conversation with her doctor.

Rose – Liberated Single – single, has open relationship girlfriend, Googles symptoms searching for answers, recurring symptoms worry her, often feels isolated, alone and judged.

Heather – Worried Partner – in committed relationship with boyfriend, mortified by symptoms, hides situation from partner, worried about future fertility.

Rose



LIBERATED SINGLE

Rose is 22, single and a uni student. She has a girlfriend, but they are in an open relationship.

Although Rose is confident in her sexuality, physical changes like sudden uncomfortable and sometimes painful symptoms often cause her concern. When symptoms such as vaginal itching and profuse discharge escalate, she Googles the symptoms to understand what's going on and to seek comfort.

Often in public on her smart phone, she searches these symptoms and uses diagnostic checkers to self diagnose. Many times, before making a decision on what to do, the symptoms often subside. *phew*

However when the symptoms return and got worse, so does the worry. She returns to websites to continue the hunt for an answer. The opinions, differing medical advice, crossover and vagueness of symptoms amplify the worry into fear of a having contracted a life altering condition.

Even worse is the diminishing lack of self worth, and the feelings of stigma and judgment on sexual behaviours, especially if it results in contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

Rose doesn't feel safe in asking advice from friends. After much worrying, and not really getting a clear enough answer on the internet she decides "better safe than sorry". She heads to the MSHC, where she is diagnosed with BV and Chlamydia.

CONCERNS:

- Often feels awful about what is going on down there, but doesn't want to alarm her partners unnecessarily.
- Her sexual activity attracts judgement, and despite her own opinions this wears her down, and she feels isolated and judged.
- Websites and search results are too broad, and the results of symptom checkers are unclear.

GOALS:

- Bite sized chunks of clear info on each condition so she can make a faster decision on what to do, based on what she thinks is going on.
- Not feel so judged, when going to the doctor.
- Overcoming the fear and anxiety of going to the doctor.
- Confronting and understanding of what is going on in her body, and how to get well.

"I OFTEN FEEL LIKE SHIT ABOUT WHAT GOES ON DOWN THERE, AND THE WEBSITES JUST MAKE YOU FEEL WORSE, AND SOCIETY JUDGES YOU, AND THAT YOU ARE A MINORITY"

Heather



WORRIED PARTNER

Heather is 28 years old, and a Marketing Manager. She and her boyfriend Jack have been together for just over a year in a committed relationship with talk of their future together.

Heather is mortified by ongoing health problems which cause vaginal discharge and a strong fishy smell. She is terribly embarrassed and hides the situation from Jack.

She worries about her fertility and feels all future plans for marriage, children and a happy life are under threat.

Heather has visited her doctor on countless occasions. He has diagnosed her problem as Thrush and continually advises her to buy over-the-counter cream.

The cream is not helping and her symptoms persist. She seeks a second opinion but gets the same diagnosis. In desperation she Googles the symptoms and reads about a number of conditions which match her situation.

In a panic about what she may have she makes an appointment at the MSHC where she is diagnosed with BV.

CONCERNS:

- Worried that the odour is noticeable to others, especially her partner.
- Her symptoms give her concern she may have something very serious.
- Her doctor doesn't seem equipped with the knowledge or duty of care in supporting her health.

GOALS:

- A better understanding of the various women's health concerns and how they relate to fertility.
- Feel more comfortable about speaking to her partner about these issues.
- Find a health care professional specialising in women's healthcare and wellbeing.
- Further understanding on BV specifically, how to manage recurrence and the future research for a cure.

"NO ONE CARES, IT IS NOT REAL... I MUST BE IMAGINING IT"

- Web developers audited and catalogued existing BV content & best practice examples
- Compared to motivators, goals and needs identified by women

Drove website design, branding & search engine optimisation

WHAT WOMEN WANTED:

- Credible, trustworthy information written by experts
- Simple, easy to understand & not overly medicalised
- Clear information about BV and thrush – symptoms, treatment, testing etc.
- Where they could seek help
- Other women's experiences
- Current research and advancements in the area



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[Vaginal Health](#)

[Common Conditions](#)

[Seeking Treatment](#)

[Updates](#)

[About Us](#)

Most women at some stage in their lives experience a vaginal infection...and wonder 'What's Going On Down There?'. Vaginal conditions are very common, and while most are not serious, they can make women feel embarrassed and concerned.

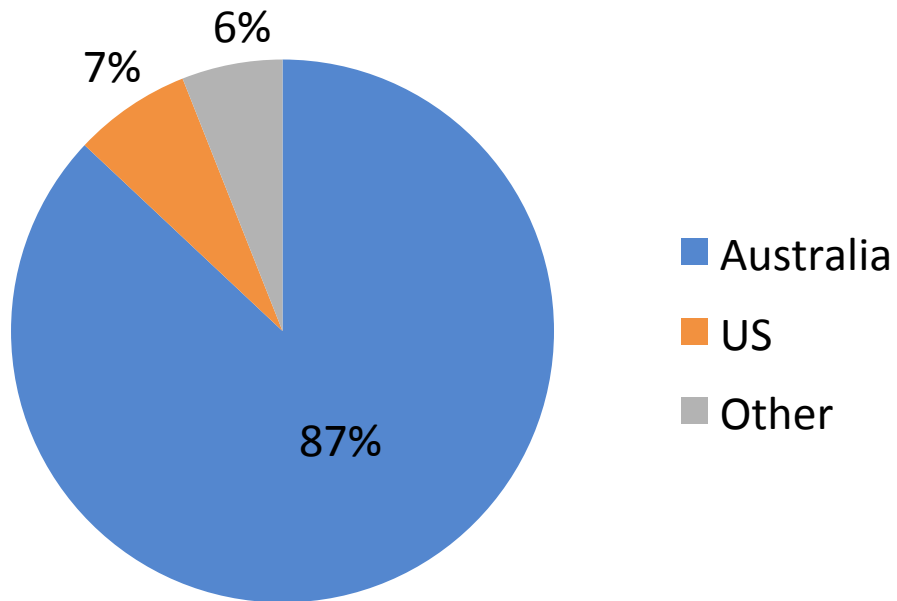
The two most common conditions are [bacterial vaginosis](#) and [thrush](#). Most women have heard about thrush but few know about bacterial vaginosis.

[ABOUT US >](#)

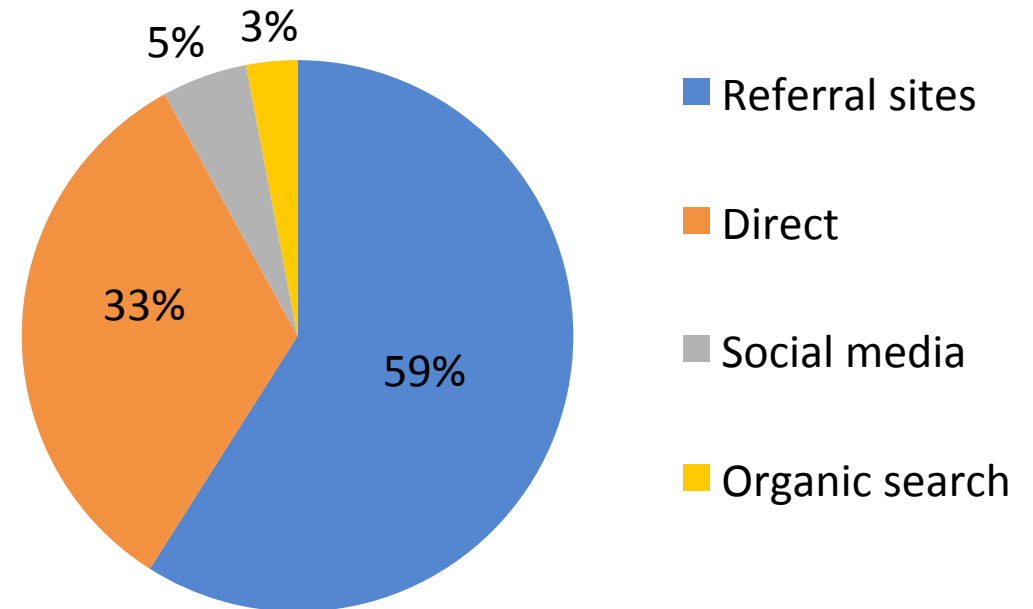
Launched April, 2018:

- 4,000 visits by 3265 users (92% new users)

Users by country



Accessing the site



User feedback form

- 5 question feedback pop-up
 - Was info helpful? Y/N
 - Symptoms
 - BV/Thrush/Other
 - Likely to visit doctor now?
 - Other comments?
- 128 forms completed to date
 - 96% found website useful
 - 60% would visit doctor after

Work in sexual health,
recommend this site to
clients. Keep up the great
work!

This is the first time I've
heard of BV and I'm always
looking to learn more about
my body and things that
might affect me.

This has solidified my
decision that I need to go
and see a doctor rather
than take OTCs.

Where to from here...

- National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STI (NCHADS), Ministry of Health, Cambodia – want a mirror site in Khmer language
- A 12 month post launch evaluation will be undertaken in mid 2019 to examine the useability and acceptability of the website.

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