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BMA News

In the presence of prejudice

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Kathrin Whitehouse rightly points out that some men, like women, refuse to consent to procedures performed by the opposite sex ('The fairer sex').

Yet studies exploring preferences for the gender of healthcare professionals are overwhelmingly about female patients, even though an increasing proportion of healthcare professionals in the NHS are women.

We gave an anonymous questionnaire to 100 consecutive men attending a prostate and testicular cancer follow-up clinic. These men often have testicular or rectal examinations in the clinic and sometimes have concerns about sexual dysfunction.

Eighty-nine men responded to this survey exploring their attitudes and preferences towards female physicians, female nurses and chaperones. A minority (11 per cent) expressed a preference for a male doctor and no man expressed a preference for a female doctor. About 12 per cent did not feel comfortable talking to a male doctor in the presence of a female nurse.

Furthermore, even though the GMC, from its guidance Maintaining Boundaries in 2006, advises chaperones for either sex, a significant proportion of our patients (56.2 per cent overall) preferred not to have nurses present during consultations with doctors.

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