

## What holds us back?

*"Thinking about discussing sex is more frightening than actually doing it, and the reactions we're fearful of very rarely occur.*

Dr Daniel Atkinson GP

Talking about sex in the work environment may not always seem easy. A 2012 paper "Why don't healthcare professionals talk about sex?" concluded that only 6% initiated discussions on a frequent basis

As professionals, we may hold back because of...

- feeling embarrassed — whereas given the professional setting, there is no need for embarrassment
- feeling there's no time — in fact, the average consultation on sexual matters takes only a few minutes
- not wanting to offend the client or to seem nosey — whereas clients are often very relieved that the topic has been raised
- being worried that a sexual conversation might be misconstrued —if in doubt a chaperone can be invited into the room
- not believing there's a solution to the client's problem — in fact there may be many solutions, both medical and therapeutic
- thinking we lack knowledge — acting as a gatekeeper for signposting or a further referral is often all that is needed
- thinking the client should start the conversation - whereas in fact....

Patients and clients may hold back because of their own issues:

- feeling embarrassed, inhibited, guilty or having no self-confidence
- shame at being sexual, e.g. because they are female, older, feel unattractive or are strictly religious
- believing they should be able to sort out their own problems
- thinking the health professional might disapprove
- not realising that everything legal is confidential
- not believing there's a solution to their problem
- not feeling entitled to have sex
- thinking the health professional should start the conversation

Remember that not talking about sexual symptoms during a consultation, may not only be denying clients support and help but also denying health professionals a full picture of the clients' condition so enabling a full diagnosis and suitable treatment (it is also illegal and discriminatory to deny disabled people the same opportunities as everyone else).