

BARTHOLIN'S ABSCESS

Dated November, 2007

HISTORY

- 24 year old woman
- Presented with painful vulvar swelling for a few days
- 5 days previously she had been sexually assaulted by a group of men

EXAMINATION



DIAGNOSIS

Bartholin's gland abscess

She was referred to the Emergency Department at the Royal Womens Hospital, where the abscess was incised, drained and marsupialized. **Streptococcus pyogenes** was isolated from the pus.

THE LESSON

- Bartholin's glands are the female homologues of Cowper's glands in men.

This list of homologues (courtesy of Wikipedia) of the human reproductive system shows how indifferent embryonic organs differentiate into the respective sex organs in males and females. Mullerian ducts are also referred to as paramesonephric ducts, and Wolffian ducts as mesonephric duct.

Indifferent	Male	Female
Gonad	Testis	Ovary
Mullerian duct	Prostatic utricle	Uterus, proximal vagina
Wolffian duct	Rete testis	Rete ovarii
Mesonephric tubules	Efferent ducts	Epoophoron
Wolffian duct	Epididymis	Gartner's duct
Wolffian duct	Vas deferens	
Wolffian duct	Seminal vesicle	
Wolffian duct	Prostate	Skene's glands
Urogenital sinus	Bladder, urethra	Bladder, urethra, distal vagina
Urogenital sinus	Cowper's or Bulbourethral gland	Bartholin's gland
Genital swelling	Scrotum	Labia majora
Urogenital folds	Spongy urethra	Labia minora
Genital tubercle	Penis	Clitoris
Prepuce	Foreskin	Clitoral hood
	Bulb of penis	Vestibular bulbs
	Glans penis	Clitoral glans
	Crus of penis	Clitoral crura
	processus vaginalis	Canal of Nuck

- Abscesses of Bartholin's glands may arise either spontaneously, in which case the infection is almost

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always polymicrobial, or as a result of gonococcal or chlamydial infection. Streptococcal infection is uncommon.

- Treatment is surgical. Antibiotics are indicated only if there is significant surrounding cellulites, or an organism of public health importance eg gonococci, chlamydia and *Streptococcus pyogenes*.

Marsupialization involves excising the cyst wall and suturing the edges to the vulvar mucosa, to form a shallow cavity which remains open and can drain freely

Another technique popular in the US (but not in Australia) is the placement of a Word catheter.

This is a small latex catheter inserted through an incision into the abscess cavity. The balloon is inflated with water or gel and the free end is tucked into the vagina.

This is left in place for 4 weeks, by which time a new drainage tract will have re-epithelialized.