

PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE

THE SILENT EPIDEMIC

Third Edition

By Sherrie Palm

ENDORSEMENTS

CLINICIAN:

"As a physician, I feel it is truly important for my patients to understand the important issues related to prolapse and urinary incontinence, as well as the options for treating these distressing conditions. With a good understanding of the problem and their options, women can make good informed choices regarding their care. As a surgeon, I spend a lot of time explaining pelvic organ prolapse to my patients.

I am very pleased to see Sherrie Palm doing the same thing from a woman's perspective. As a woman who had to deal with prolapse herself, she shares the inside information on how to recognize prolapse and how to get qualified help for it. This book is a must read for every woman who is concerned about pelvic organ prolapse!"

Lennox Hoyte MD, MSEECS
Managing Member
The Pelvic Floor Institute
Tampa, FL/USA
Author: [A Patient Guide to Prolapse Repair](#)

"At last, pelvic organ prolapse is emerging from the shadows and into the spotlight, as women and their physicians begin to appreciate that prolapse is remarkably common, and perhaps even more importantly that prolapse can be effectively treated, and quality of life restored. Sherrie Palm's tireless work as a patient advocate, and as an author of "Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic", continues to play a key role in this transformation of women's healthcare. I recommend Sherrie's book as an essential reference for women impacted by these conditions, or for any individual seeking a better understanding of this remarkably common women's health condition."

Roger P. Goldberg, MD MPH
Director, Division of Urogynecology, Northshore University HealthSystem
Clinical Associate Professor, Obstetrics and Gynecology
University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine
Author: [Ever Since I Had My Baby](#)

"Sherrie Palm's book, 'Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic', is my single most trusted resource for my patients to gain insight and education for optimal decision making in their care. I keep several copies available in my office at all times and encourage my patients to get a copy of their own."

Vincent Lucente, MD, MBA
The Institute for Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery
Allentown, PA/USA

“The global prevalence of pelvic organ prolapse (POP) is increasing and has more recently reached community pandemic proportions in women’s health. POP is indeed a silent affliction mainly because of inadequate public knowledge, so a much greater epidemic is anticipated if patient information is improved. This, I believe, is the key contribution of Sherrie Palm’s book: it serves as a sharp reminder to health policy makers of an impending “prolapse-quake” when more women become aware of the causes, manifestations, consequences and therapeutic options after reading this comprehensive educational package. Whilst not life-threatening, POP has the potential for a significant adverse impact on quality of life, as reported eloquently in the book, and thus the patient perspective has become increasingly important when evaluating the symptoms and treatment outcomes.

As clinicians, our management strategy for POP is often based on the best available scientific evidence and physician-directed guidelines. Sherrie Palm, however, provides us again with a finger-on-the-pulse resource to ensure that the diagnostic and management principles of POP are also women-centered. The growing complexity of biomedical research and clinical practice dictates newer methods of service delivery. As a direct result, health care providers are required to consider person-orientated medical approaches and explore novel models of individualized science—a woman with POP is a case in point. Urogynaecologists who are the perfect and natural advocates for women with POP will thus find the third edition of the seminal monograph ‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’, by Sherrie Palm, extremely enlightening.”

Diaa E. E. Rizk, MSc, FRCS, FRCOG, MD, Dip BA,
Professor and Chairman,
Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
College of Medicine and Medical Sciences
Arabian Gulf University
Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain

“Kudos to Sherrie Palm for her updated ‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic,’ which de-stigmatizes and takes out of the closet this important, highly prevalent, but largely hushed issue. Chock full of information, it is uniquely written from the perspective of the patient who by sharing her personal experience will enlighten and benefit women worldwide. A staunch champion of women’s pelvic health, Sherrie continues her advocacy with great strides forward with respect to awareness, guidance and support, accelerating the pelvic organ prolapse movement.”

Andrew Siegel, MD
Urology Attending, Hackensack University Medical Center
Assistant Clinical Professor Surgery, Division of Urology
Rutgers-NJ Medical School
Hackensack, NJ/USA
Author: [The Kegel Fix: Recharging Female Pelvic, Sexual and Urinary Health](#)

“Sherrie Palm has a dream: she wants to inform women with POP that they are not alone and that many women share the same condition. Patient information is really important because it helps people to look for answers. We, as physicians involved in POP treatment, should help people like Sherrie in their activities because they help us in our mission: improve the health of our patients.”

Enrico Finazzi Agrò, MD
Associate Professor of Urology
President of the Italian Society of Urodynamics (SIUD)
Dept. of Experimental Medicine and Surgery
Tor Vergata University
Unit of Functional Urology
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Rome, Italy

"Brilliant clinical and personal experience by Sherrie Palm has given the reader an unbiased, thoughtful, and useful insight into the issues surrounding pelvic organ prolapse. By being a well-versed patient advocate she is able to bridge the gaps of knowledge and experience that the lay person can relate with and the doctor relate to."

Red M. Alinsod, MD, FACOG, FACS, ACGE
Urogynecology & Pelvic Reconstructive Surgery
Laguna Beach, CA/USA

“I often get the question about a woman’s prolapse: "Why didn't my doctor find this (prolapse) when he/she did my exam?" And my answer usually is "If you don't look for it, you won't find it!" Pelvic organ prolapse is definitely a silent epidemic as Sherrie points out that lacks awareness among the public - so women with vague symptoms "down there" don't even know what to ask for and are ecstatic when someone, usually after multiple doctors' visits, finally recognizes the problem and can address it. Lack of awareness has led to the stigma which has plagued this embarrassing condition. Through the tireless efforts of groups such as the Association for Pelvic Organ Prolapse Support, the breakthrough is slowly coming. Urinary incontinence, a similarly embarrassing problem, has largely broken away from this stigma in the last 20 years - it's time pelvic organ prolapse did too!”

Sumana Koduri, MD
Associate Professor of Obstetrics/Gynecology and Urology
Medical College of Wisconsin
Milwaukee, WI/USA

“Sherrie Palm is an amazing woman with a lot of energy. She is leading a great movement to break the stigma surrounding pelvic organ prolapse. The 3rd edition of ‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’ is evidence of this. It is filled with great information to help women

navigate the healthcare system and to help them make informed decisions, leading to the improvement of the quality of their health and their lives. This is a must read for every woman experiencing pelvic organ prolapse. It is also a great resource for healthcare providers.”

Debbie Callif, OT, BCB-PMD

Co-owner Continence & Pelvic Wellness Clinic

Board of Directors Biofeedback Certification International Alliance, Chair of Pelvic Muscle Dysfunction

Board of Directors International Pelvic Pain Society

Mequon, WI/USA

“In a time when data analytics and Triple Aim discussions are shaping priorities and budgets with respect to optimizing health care delivery, this book provides tremendous and timely insights for not only improving the POP patient experience of care, but also is a call for action for clinicians to be able to apply integrated, evidence-based research and approaches for prevention, assessment and treatment that improve patient outcomes and costs across the continuum of care. “Hear Us” has been Sherrie Palm’s mission for a number of years. Her tenacious efforts to raise awareness, educate and challenge the health care environment to embrace a multidisciplinary, patient centered delivery of care is resonating. It is my belief that her efforts, over a number of years, are about to fuel dramatic changes in the way we talk about and cultivate an outlook that appreciates the essential need for progress to move from a linear dimension, to one that suddenly explodes with dramatic advancements in the field of POP care. Thank you Sherrie, for awakening us all!”

Ms. Karen L. Campbell, RN, BScN

Corporate and Community Health Consultant

Retired Director of Wellness Northern Kentucky University

Cincinnati, Ohio/USA

“‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’ is one of the most in depth resources on prolapse I have read. Sherrie covers every possible question for women concerning prolapse with great detail on treatments, surgery, possible complications, and essential questions to ask the surgeon. If you want to learn more about prolapse and treatment options, put this book on your reading list.”

Mary O'Dwyer

Women's Health Physiotherapist

Brisbane, Australia

Author: [Hold It Sister & Hold It Mama](#)

“Sherrie is an accomplished author and a dear friend who has dedicated her career and life to helping women navigate the world of pelvic organ prolapse. I am honored to endorse her latest book, ‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’. Sherrie has touched so many women around the world suffering from POP issues and has been able to change their lives in so many

ways. It is about time that women start talking about intimate issues! Because of the work Sherrie has done, this quite private subject is being brought to the forefront. We now have pharmaceutical companies looking at new devices and therapies that can help women. This book provides a resource for every woman to find minimally invasive solutions through surgical options for managing the condition.”

Debra Muth BSN, MSNH, WHNP, BAAHP
Serenity Health Care Center
Waukesha, WI/USA

“Sherrie’s passion for smashing the stigma and breaking the silence surrounding prolapse is evidenced, not only in her book ‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’, but also from her amazing APOPS Facebook Group (POPS), which she has established. The book has increased credibility for women because of Sherrie’s own personal journey with prolapse and the APOPS Facebook group has become a safe haven for women to share their journey with other kindred sisters, as well as an invaluable resource for information as to how to manage prolapse. Well done Sherrie, and thank you for your efforts to bring prolapse out of the closet.”

Sue Croft, Physiotherapist,
Brisbane, Australia.

Author: Pelvic Floor Essentials and Pelvic Floor Recovery: Physiotherapy for Gynaecological Repair Surgery

“‘Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic’ is a wonderful collection of information for women looking for support and treatment for pelvic organ prolapse. I recommend it to my patients as an adjunct to physical therapy treatment. Patient education is very important in healing and this is a great resource.”

Beth Shelly, PT, DPT, WCS, BCB PMD
Beth Shelly Physical Therapy
Moline, IL/US/USA

“Sher provides an excellent resource for women and health professionals. Within that resource is an abundance of support and knowledge provided through her wisdom, experience and loving heart.”

Patricia Koehler Lawn, CSW, CHt, Certified Practitioner of Holographic Memory Resolution
Pewaukee, WI/USA

PATIENT:

“Sherrie Palm is an extraordinary advocate for women who are navigating POP. Her initiative to found the APOPS advocacy agency and to write this book has changed lives, and continues to change lives every day. Like most women, I had not heard of POP until I was diagnosed. Because of the stigma attached to the symptoms, I remained silent, isolated and lost. As soon as I began reading this book, I immediately felt understood. Sherrie’s knowledge, energy and passion to help women navigate this tough condition is palpable throughout the book. It is frequently said that knowledge is power, I think that is a great way to describe this book. With each chapter the reader will gain knowledge and become empowered. This book also addresses the impact POP has on our quality of life, which is so validating, and that is priceless!”

Sherrie is such an inspiration as she continues her crusade to educate women, healthcare providers, and academics about the impact that POP has on lives. She understands that impact and she has dedicated her life to educating others and to obliterating the stigma attached to POP. I am so grateful for this book, for APOPS, and for Sherrie. This book is a must read for all women, as we are all vulnerable to issues affecting the pelvic floor.

Thank you, Sherrie Palm, for modeling passion, compassion, tenacity, and persistence, and for encouraging and empowering women to use their voice...because it is true - every voice matters”

Mary Pippen
Kentucky/USA

“Living with a POP diagnosis can be a frightening and lonely time. With no education of its existence, POP is truly a 'silent epidemic', Organizations like APOPS are giving voice to the concerns and needs of an up-until-now voiceless population. Becoming a member of Sherrie's APOPS support group has empowered me to advocate for myself as I make my way through this POP journey.”

Cathy Carlin
Minnesota/USA

“Sherrie Palm is a warrior out to vanquish the ignorance and shame surrounding pelvic organ prolapse. She has designed the quintessential weapon in her organization, Association for Pelvic Organ Prolapse Support, and women of the world are fortunate to have her as an ally. I was one of those women; confused and disheartened by the alarming changes in my nether regions. Fortunately, I was somehow guided to Sherrie and the extensive information available on the APOPS site. Her tireless guidance was integral in helping me through this very challenging time in my life. APOPS is the preeminent source promoting education of women dealing with pelvic organ prolapse and the medical professionals responsible for preventing, diagnosing and treating POP. Sherrie and APOPS are indispensable in the effort to initiate and support research on the condition, and are vital liaisons between the medical community and the government agencies that regulate the related industries. We are all lucky to have Sherrie as our advocate!”

Jacqueline Munera
Florida/USA

“Sherrie Palm is a fearless, superbly informed, and tireless advocate for women who suffer from pelvic organ prolapse (POP). She is willing to speak out for all of us who are affected by this humiliating and debilitating condition, which, as she emphasizes, can be easily screened for, and managed. As Sherrie notes, this is a “silent epidemic” affecting millions of women globally. It impacts our sexuality, our continence, our ability to lift, carry, laugh, eliminate, and move. For many women, POP decides for us how many children we can bear.

Women whose jobs depend on heavy lifting – women who serve in the military, who wait tables, who stock shelves, cater food and do any sort of heavy labor find themselves forced to choose between long-term health, career and income. In this way, POP is also an “invisible” disability with economic consequences for these women and their families. We deal with our humiliating symptoms in silence – either not knowing why we have them, or being fully aware but feeling equally powerless in the face of non-invasive medical devices that have scarcely changed since antiquity, or highly complex surgical procedures that can carry considerable risk. The other solution we have is neatly packaged diapers in pastel boxes at the local drugstore. We are half the world, birth the world and deserve better information, options and treatment.

So many women – whether new mothers or squarely on the other side of menopause – say “If I only knew” when they learn that POP is the root of their physical pain, sexual dysfunction, and fecal and urinary incontinence. Sherrie’s life work is to make sure more and more women know how to prevent and manage POP. And thanks to the information in this book, the medical community is becoming more sensitized.

Since POP results from tears and damage to fascia, muscle, tendons and ligaments that happen differently in each woman, all of us have different symptoms. Sherrie urges medical professionals to tune in, use patient-centered care and treat each case individually. POP is also a condition that can be improved with access to physical therapy. Sherrie recognizes the fundamental importance of getting therapists, doctors, and patients to share information and experience. Cross-fertilization of ideas among these three constituencies is the key to innovation, expanding awareness, and proactive prevention.

Most importantly, Sherrie’s work inspires us to join forces in order to restore not only our health, but our dignity.”

Caitlin Bergin
Washington, DC/USA

“One of the greatest challenges as women with POP, is just how isolating it is. That constant 'ache' - that no one understands you or can relate to you; the sense of embarrassment and shame that surfaces even when well-meaning and loving people can inadvertently make an off handed

comment that makes you want to retreat back and close off from others even further. Through APOPS, I continue to gain the strength to recognize this health condition for what it is - a part of me, but not all of me. I am more accepting of myself because I know I am not alone. I am forever grateful to Sherrie Palm, for building and nurturing this bridge of compassion, awareness, and advocacy to be listened to and heard.”

Karen L. Campbell
Ohio/USA

“Through her own heroic efforts and the support of APOPS and Sherrie, I have watched my beautiful wife, Karen, battle from "victim" to "champion" of her own health. As her loving companion, I actively needed to create the safe space to listen to her concerns, learn the language by which we could meaningfully communicate and develop the patience that there are no easy answers. Too few health care providers can truly contribute positive guidance. From watching and supporting Karen, I know that progress can be made and a return to positive health is possible. This comes about through commitment and optimism, a caring community of support, and determined health care professionals who not only have expertise in the field, but the ability to listen to and acknowledge the wide-reaching negative impacts this condition can make in the lives of their patients and those who surround them. Through all the resources and dialogue of the outstanding APOPS organization, led brilliantly by Sherrie Palm, together, we have built capacity and skills to overcome. Sherrie is a true blessing to our community.”

John S. Campbell, husband of Karen Campbell
President Clippard Instrument Laboratories
Ohio/USA

“Read Sherrie Palm's book, 3rd edition, which will completely explain pelvic organ prolapse. What it is, what to do, where to go, how to repair it, how to be you again. It is a common condition which many women face, and are totally embarrassed to discuss. I don't want other women to suffer, as I did, and neither do you. Bless you, warrior for women!”

Ceil LaPorta
Retired social worker
Illinois/USA

“I wish to express my sincere appreciation for all that Sherrie Palm has done for women all over the world, but me especially, in my search for answers to POP prior to my surgery Jan 2011. I found her by accident while searching the Internet for answers. Her first edition, "Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic" was a godsend. Everything I needed to know before and after my surgery was there at my fingertips with each turn of the page. I consider it my POP Bible and eagerly anticipate the next edition. I feel confident enough now to call myself the "POP Diva" thanks to Sherrie.” I consider her my POP angel.”

Margaret Forrest, Retired DOD
Supervisory Program Management Analyst
MEDIA AND MORE:

"I cannot overstate how important bringing attention to this issue is. Pelvic organ prolapse is something I know has affected so many women close to me, yet it's something we almost never discuss. We need to educate, agitate, and mobilize people on this issue, because women, especially women of color, are most likely not to have adequate healthcare coverage, and therefore less likely to seek medical treatment. Women affected by POP are entitled to their healing, and I'm so glad Sherrie is empowering women with her work. I was so happy to participate in APOPS Stigma Stride Walkathon in 2015, and I look forward to the day when we women can speak loud and proud about our bodies."

Senator Lena C. Taylor
4th Senate District of Wisconsin
Wisconsin/USA

"Sherrie Palm brings to light a "hidden" problem that all women and their men should know about. She is warm and engaging and speaks frankly and clearly about this Silent Epidemic. A number of my other medical guests know and respect her work."

Mike Schikman
WSVA Radio
Virginia/USA

"Despite progression in women's breast health, little has shifted in vaginal health awareness. Why after all these years does the central source of life remain absurdly stigmatized? Now more than ever we must shine a light on this most significant aspect of women's health, to enable common conditions such as pelvic organ prolapse to become screened for, diagnosed, treated, and most importantly, de-stigmatized. No woman should suffer needlessly. We must demand the right to healthy vaginas as it is equivalent to the demand for a healthy life."

Eve Ensler
The Vagina Monologues

"Pelvic Organ Prolapse is a serious problem that I've learned many women are dealing with in silence. With symptoms comparable to puberty or menopause combined with internal injuries, we need to not only be there to support women around us, but to help others become aware of the stigma surrounding pelvic organ prolapse. Tragically few are even aware that this condition exists, or that it causes so much fear and struggle. This is where patients, relatives, activists, neighbors, donors, doctors, and community leaders can come together in agreement and

purpose, to ensure that we're doing what we each can to promote awareness of pelvic organ prolapse."

Deanna Alexander
Milwaukee County Supervisor DA
Wisconsin/USA

"Pelvic Organ Prolapse: The Silent Epidemic" is the defining masterpiece of Sherrie Palm's educational mission regarding the origins and concerns surrounding pelvic organ prolapse. Her passion and commitment towards informing women of all ages about this condition is second to none. Being a woman who experienced the symptoms firsthand, Sher has dedicated her life to raising awareness for this often misunderstood and stigmatizing condition, and this book is the number one most informative piece on the market for anyone looking to learn more about this disorder."

Brendan Lee McAvoy, Attorney
McAvoy & Murphy Law Firm LLC
Wisconsin/USA

"From personal experience and numerous consultations with experts, Sherrie Palm is committed to help women to improve their quality of life for a stigmatized condition. Her book about pelvic organ prolapse (POP) and related complications addresses the causes, the diagnostic process, treatment options, and preventive strategies. She speaks passionately and advocates to build bridges with diverse stakeholders in addressing POP more openly and effectively."

John Meurer, MD, MBA
Professor and Director of the Institute for Health & Equity
Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Wisconsin/USA

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CONTRIBUTIONS

In warm appreciation for members of the healthcare, advocacy, and academic sectors who so very generously contributed their voices to the third edition, and my heartfelt gratitude to APOPS patient following who contributed to this book, and continue to contribute daily within our patient support spaces.

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FOREWORD

By Roger Dmochowski, MD, MMHC, FACS

January 3, 2017

Pelvic organ prolapse (POP) is truly a condition that is disruptive to quality of life, bothersome to women in their most active years as well as later in life. POP is a health concern which connotes almost a “taboo-like” quality related to both interpersonal as well as professional communication, and one that is surrounded by substantial gaps of knowledge and inherently wrong information, much of it imparted by well-meaning but incompletely informed sources.

This book is a sentinel accomplishment, an effort to improve knowledge empowerment and patient awareness of pelvic organ prolapse including the condition’s impact on the overall woman, as well as the multi-faceted symptoms associated with this disorder. It has been said previously that “knowledge is power”. This tome provides core knowledge which allows women to most importantly, understand POP, as well as consider reasonable options for management of this entity.

I have had the singular pleasure to have professionally worked with and observe Ms. Palm over the last five years. She is an energetic and powerful voice for women with pelvic organ prolapse. Sherrie has traveled the world, understanding cultural adaptations to this condition (given that it affects women of all cultures and geographies). Sherrie’s willingness to give of herself to assist her sisters in the management of this condition is exemplary of her commitment and concern for women who experience POP. She has taken a publicly relatively obscure topic and conveyed it in a straight-forward and easy to understand method. Most importantly, she has provided women with the insights to seek intervention and care when appropriate, and to understand the options and choices that are involved in the management of this condition.

Pelvic organ prolapse is a condition that the remedy often offered is surgery. It is important that women understand there are multiple options aside from surgery for the management of this condition and its attendant symptoms, inclusive of a cohesive and global management strategy that includes attention to the urinary, bowel, sexual function, and potential pain components that POP can cause for women.

This is a “must read” for those women who wish to be fully informed in a balanced and reasonable way, and who wish to obtain critical understanding of their condition for purposes of making informed choices.

Sherrie Palm should be recognized for her unwavering commitment to women who suffer with pelvic organ prolapse, and her willingness to give of herself to improve the status of those women.

Roger Dmochowski, MD, MMHC, FACS
Associate Surgeon in Chief
Professor of Urology
Director, Pelvic Medicine and Reconstruction Fellowship
Department of Urology
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Associate Chief of Staff
Medical Director of Risk Management
Vanderbilt University Hospital

INTRODUCTION

THE VAGINA: THE MOST STIGMATIZED HEALTH FRONTIER

The subliminal message women receive from early childhood on is we should not look at, talk about, or explore our vagina or vulva. It's no wonder we have such a difficult time understanding vaginal health. By definition, stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance or quality. Feeling labeled or defined by a health condition can be devastating.

Women typically have never heard of pelvic organ prolapse (POP) prior to the fateful examination which indicates they are experiencing the condition. Discovery upon diagnosis is unfortunately the end-result of months, sometimes years, with no clue what is causing the painful, awkward, or embarrassing symptoms occurring. Physically incapacitating to varying degrees based on type and grade of severity, POP makes a mess out of nearly every aspect of women's lives. Pelvic organ prolapse stigma often generates feelings of shame, distress, helplessness, anxiety, blame, hopelessness, isolation, embarrassment, and fear. Frequently these stigma symptoms are coupled with shock.

"Too often we are reluctant to discuss some of the most intimate of details about our bodies with a physician. Somehow, we think we have done something wrong or have failed somehow to keep our bodies under our control. We self-stigmatize ... and as a result we often miss out on allowing our physicians to help us find a resolution to our problems. We need to realize we have not done something "wrong" and that we have every right to speak up and out about every symptom we have, and seek a physician who is willing to listen and find solutions."

~ Elizabeth A. LaGro, MLIS, The Simon Foundation for Continence

My pelvic health was never optimal, no menstrual flow prior to my 17th year, adenomyosis, fibroids, and polycystic ovaries clearly indicated my female reproductive system had issues. Despite efforts to remain pro-active to maintain my pelvic health throughout my 30s, I was absolutely stunned to be diagnosed with pelvic organ prolapse, a condition that is quite common and yet at the point of my diagnosis, I had never heard of. I had no idea what symptoms the condition displayed. I had no idea what my options for treatment were. I'd always done "the

right thing” regarding routine maintenance, and kept up with routine pelvic exams, mammograms, and hormone supplementation. I found it quite unnerving to be told I had a condition that is quite common and yet I knew nothing about.

Even though I had always been pro-active regarding health, I didn’t realize that symptoms I started having around the time of my hysterectomy at 40 were cause for concern. Loss of pubococcygeus (PC) muscle strength, inability to keep a tampon in, inability to start my urine stream, feeling of “fullness” in the abdominal area, chronic constipation, and the lump of tissue bulging out of my vagina were all symptoms that, if recognized, might have led me to earlier diagnosis and less aggressive treatment.

I asked multiple clinicians whose paths I crossed during my course of treatment why I’d never heard of POP. I wanted to know why the topic had never come up. I continually received the same response to my query: *women won’t talk about it*. I found this both unsettling and unacceptable.

In the course of scouting for answers to address my own needs, I became determined to find a path to enable women to become informed about pelvic organ prolapse prior to diagnosis-not only women seeking treatment, but in essence, all women. The conversation should begin during the first pelvic exam a woman experiences. Women need to be informed and educated about the significance of the PC muscle for pelvic floor health, childbirth health, sexual health, and continence health. This would enable young women to recognize commonly occurring female pelvic health concerns such as POP or incontinence.

It seems absurd that there is so little conversation about pelvic organ prolapse at this stage of women’s health evolution. My sincere hope is that this book will generate open dialogue to enable women to recognize symptoms indicating POP, as well as stimulate conversations with clinicians who currently seldom screen for POP during routine pelvic exams. Knowledge of pelvic organ prolapse is a pivotal piece of women’s health awareness, whether in modernized societies or in developing zones.

"Throughout the developing world birthrates remain high and obstetric care suboptimal. Although improvements in health care are reducing the most severe obstetric injuries - maternal death and obstetric fistula - we are starting to see a substantial increase in women presenting with advanced pelvic organ prolapse. This may well become an epidemic over the next decade. There is already a great need for education and training in this area. We and others are broadening our mission to include the care of these women. Prevention, however, will require access to quality obstetric care for all women and broad acceptance of equal rights for women and girls. We have a very long way to go in this regard."

~Christopher Payne, MD

While the statistics behind pelvic organ prolapse are staggering, the reality is we have no accurate data capture on POP prevalence at the current time. Current research often estimates that up to 50% of the female population will experience pelvic organ prolapse, or that half of parous women have POP, or that half of menopausal women have POP. According to a 2009 study, the number of women with at least one pelvic floor disorder will increase significantly between 2010 to 2050, shifting from 28.1 million in 2010 to between 43.8 and 58.2 million in 2050. These figures are inclusive of breakdowns of an increase in prevalence for urinary incontinence by 55%, fecal incontinence by 59%, and pelvic organ prolapse by 46%. Both urinary and fecal incontinence frequently occur with POP. The current number of women in the US estimated in this study to have POP is 3.3 million. Considering lack of POP screening that currently exists, I ponder what accurate POP prevalence figures are at the current time and will become when we add routine POP screening into the mix.

Considering many women do not disclose or discuss embarrassing POP symptoms with their physicians, and standardized POP screening currently does not occur, it is not surprising that accurate figures for pelvic organ prolapse prevalence do not exist. As recognition of pelvic organ prolapse goes main stream and global POP initiatives shift, women will take comfort in the knowledge that they are not alone. Currently women shy away from disclosing signs and symptoms of POP to others because of the stigma attached to vaginal tissue bulge, urinary or fecal incontinence, and sexual dysfunction. Awareness is key to reduce stigma and generate comfortable open dialogue.

Along my journey, I have been incredibly fortunate to meet many progressive healthcare professionals, individuals who recognize change is coming in the pelvic organ prolapse arena.

“Biomedical engineering has revolutionized medicine from the implantation of artificial organs to the optimization of complex surgeries in many fields, but has only begun to scratch the surface in women's health. Pelvic organ prolapse is a disorder that encompasses the entire field of biomedical engineering including mechanics, physiology, and clinical treatment. Every aspect of understanding, treating, and managing POP from the birth trauma (mechanics) to the progressive weakening (physiology) to the reconstructive mesh surgeries (clinical treatment) can benefit from the unique, interdisciplinary insights biomedical engineering provides.

A small number of exceptionally dedicated researchers have made incredible progress in POP and incontinence research, but they can only do so much. Because of the code of silence surrounding POP, few researchers and fewer research dollars are applied to solving these far-reaching problems. It is absolutely imperative that our society breaks from this trend.”

~Benjamin Weed, PhD

~Ali Borazjani, PhD

I encourage all women to take control of their pelvic health and to recognize that each of us has the power to search for the answers. Pelvic organ prolapse is one of the most significant challenges women will address in the on-going struggle to attain health balance for our gender, no matter what barriers we face. For a female health condition to be shrouded in silence because of embarrassment at this point in history, after all we have achieved as women, is unacceptable. Women need to recognize that POP is a health concern, not a roadblock. As we push forward to raise POP awareness for the betterment of women's collective health, individual women will become familiar with this common, cryptic health concern, recognize the symptoms, and seek appropriate medical intervention.

Life teaches us that the lessons that cause the greatest pain, whether physical or emotional, are the lessons that remain most firmly planted in our brains. I've had the great fortune to watch countless women come into the support structures Association for Pelvic Organ Prolapse Support ((APOPS) provides. Devastated by what was occurring in their bodies, these women slowly morph, strong, empowered, and in control, upon securing the information and guidance needed

in their unique and very individual journeys to recapture health balance. I can't begin to express the pride in womanhood I feel each and every time I see the transformation occur. Equally uplifting is watching women continue on in our space after finding info to help themselves, choosing to stay in order to pay the support forward to additional women.

As we continue to advance pelvic organ prolapse directives, generating awareness, providing patient support and guidance, defining patient needs, clarifying misconceptions, and sharing insights within medical, academic, research, policy, and industry sectors to enable evolution in POP treatment, we will spawn a new era in women's vaginal health, speaking out loud unabashedly about this last forbidden health frontier. The vagina is after all, far more than a vessel of intimacy-it is a vessel of life.