PREFACE

The Microbiome as a Common Thread

In this first issue of Current Women’s Health Reviews for 2019, there are articles about management of adnexal masses, postmenopausal health and the use of herbs in postpartum women. The range of problems that concern women in this issue is relatively broad. However, while looking for a common thread for these subjects, one potential, unaddressed, thread comes up, which is the effect of the microbiome on these diverse health topics. The human microbiome is the collection of the microorganisms that live in the human body. Investigations have revealed that changes in the microbiome are associated with different ages of the subjects, different diets consumed, different geography of residence and different genders of the subjects. As important, the microbiome has been associated with different disease states, with shifts of the bacterial populations found in healthy subjects compared to subjects with specific diseases, such as inflammatory bowel disease.

In women’s health, there is an effort to study the microbiome in the female, including the vagina. However, when looking at women’s health holistically, it makes sense to hypothesize that changes in the microbiome would be associated with different women’s health problems. As an example, would a test of the microbiome in the vagina or the gut help determine the possibility of a malignancy of a cyst found in the adnexa? Furthermore, could treatment to change the microbiome change the outcome of the disease? As an example, bacterial stool transplants are currently being performed in patients with C. difficile colitis, with improvements in the patients’ clinical findings. Could a bacterial transplant be performed in postmenopausal women to improve osteoporosis or to decrease hot flashes? Could therapeutic shifting of the microbiome in patients with symptomatic endometriosis be used to alleviate some of those symptoms? The microbiome represents a new area of investigation in women’s health, with the technology now available to make the initial steps to outline what is occurring in the woman patient. It would be worthwhile to put the effort into finding out how much the human microbiome can affect and be used to improve women’s health.

John Yeh, MD
( Editor-in-Chief)
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
Harvard Medical School
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA
USA
E-mail: john.yeh.md@gmail.com