

→ PROFILE



Utilizing advanced technology and an evolved sensibility, **Dr. Maria Sophocles** helps women of all ages achieve better gynecologic function

By **Leigh Stuart**  
Photography by **Alison Dunlap**

# alive

■ Dr. Sophocles' office walls are adorned with photographs of women from other countries, reflecting the practice's commitment to international health care initiatives.

**Once considered taboo**, the topic of sex after menopause has become commonplace. But many postmenopausal women continue to suffer—often in silence—from painful intercourse and other sexual dysfunction. Sexual medicine specialists such as Maria Sophocles, M.D., are working to make sure the idea becomes reality for women in their 60s, 70s and beyond.

Dr. Sophocles, a board-certified gynecologist for 21 years and a NAMS (North American Menopause Society) Certified Menopause Practitioner, has been at the forefront of addressing the sexual problems of menopausal women. She utilizes a host of ultra-modern tools and techniques to achieve dramatic results for women with complicated and severe gynecologic issues. This includes the Mon-

alisa Touch, a revolutionary laser used for vaginal regeneration. Invented in Italy in 2008, MonaLisa Touch received clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2014. Dr. Sophocles' office was one of the first in the country to utilize this revolutionary piece of equipment for this treatment.

Because she has the most experience with vaginal laser therapy of

nearly any physician in the country, “women come here from all 50 states and from other countries,” says Dr. Sophocles. “I’m proud of the fact that we’ve established a reputation for progressive treatments and clinical excellence.”

Dr. Sophocles is careful to point out that the vaginal laser she uses is not cosmetic, and not for vaginal tightening. Rather, it generates healthy vaginal tissue to treat issues such as painful intercourse, external conditions of the vulva, vaginal dryness and even urinary dysfunction.

The laser supplies light energy to create painless, microscopic, “pin pricks” to the walls of the vagina. These tiny injuries stimulate the production of new collagen, thereby enabling the vagina to heal itself. The resulting regeneration does far more than simply making tissue healthier, according to Dr. Sophocles. “It really gives women back a sense of femininity, sexuality, self-esteem,” she says.

Patients appreciate the fact that the procedure requires no “downtime,” although she recommends that patients abstain from intercourse for two to four days after the treatment.

Another new piece of technology at Dr. Sophocles’ disposal is the DySIS Colposcope, a computer-assisted microscope that produces high-resolution images of the cervix to provide

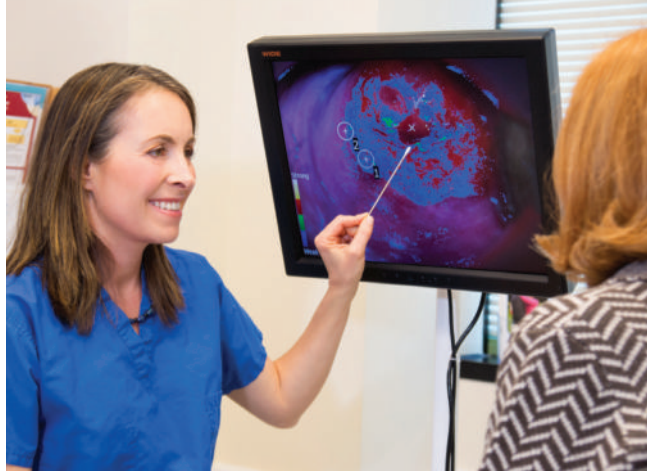
could suggest abnormalities. Should any such abnormalities be found, this technology facilitates the clear and precise biopsy of the area in question.

In Dr. Sophocles’ office, the term “cutting edge” applies to much more than technology. The doctor’s approach to her field, too, is modern and refreshing. When Dr. Sophocles returned to the United States eight years ago after an extended period of time living in Europe, she brought with her a broader, more holistic approach to a specialty in which a great many issues were not being adequately addressed.

Rather than follow along with convention, Dr. Sophocles chose to stop practicing obstetrics in order to delve more deeply into areas of gynecology in need of expertise. She started with adolescent and pediatric gynecology and has been a great resource to pediatricians and public health clinics where she volunteers as a consultant. She then realized that demographically the population was aging and issues related to menopause, including urinary and sexual issues, needed attention. She took it upon herself to explore this unmapped territory. Essentially, she “developed a practice where there wasn’t one,” she explains. Today, she enjoys an open and honest rapport with her patients—all 7,000 of them.

Dr. Sophocles often treats patients contending with issues surrounding menopause, which impacts 15 million women nationwide. Ask most people to identify the symptoms associated with menopause, and they will likely say “hot flashes.” But, as Dr. Sophocles explains, hot flashes are merely the tip of the iceberg. Other common problems include bleeding and urinary issues, painful sex, depression and weight gain. “Most women don’t realize their symptoms have to do with menopause,” she says, “but if you just take the time to listen to them, there is so much opportunity to teach them.”

Another common problem Dr. Sophocles deals with is sexual dysfunction. She sees many



■ Dr. Sophocles showing an image captured using the DySIS Colposcope



■ The MonaLisa Touch, a revolutionary CO<sub>2</sub> laser used for vaginal regeneration

the utmost in accurate diagnosis of abnormal pap smears. Although colposcopes are not new to the field of obstetrics and gynecology, the DySIS Colposcope is a revolutionary step forward. The technology produces what Dr. Sophocles refers to as a “weather map of the cervix,” highlighting features and nuances that may not be visible to even the best trained physician’s eye. Over the course of approximately two minutes, the DySIS Colposcope takes “millions of images” of the cervix and then analyzes subtle changes in color that

postmenopausal women whose husbands use Viagra, and this creates an imbalance in the sexual expectations of the relationship. “Women feel abnormal, or broken, or old, when they don’t want to have sex or want less sex than their partners,” she says. An important part of treating sexual function relates to behavioral therapy, or bringing sexuality back to the brain. “The thing women need to know is that sexuality can and should be part of life,” she says. “I find sexual health really reflects someone’s overall outlook in terms of aging, staying connected and vibrant, to one’s partner and to society. ... Women are living longer and they’re sexually active longer.”

There are ways for women of all ages to enjoy healthy, happy sex lives, and Dr. Sophocles is skilled at helping her patients achieve that goal.

Dr. Sophocles has responded to a demand for her expertise by opening an office in King of Prussia; her clinical team now includes two nurse practitioners, and another gynecologist she describes as “a phenomenal doctor with fellowship training in laparoscopic and robotic surgery.”

This will enable Dr. Sophocles to enjoy more freedom to educate both lay public and clinicians through speaking, writing and research opportunities.

That having been said, Dr. Sophocles will continue to be there for her patients. In fact, it remains her No. 1 priority. “Most women want help,” she says. “You just have to take the time to listen.” ■

→ **MARIA SOPHOCLES, M.D.**  
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