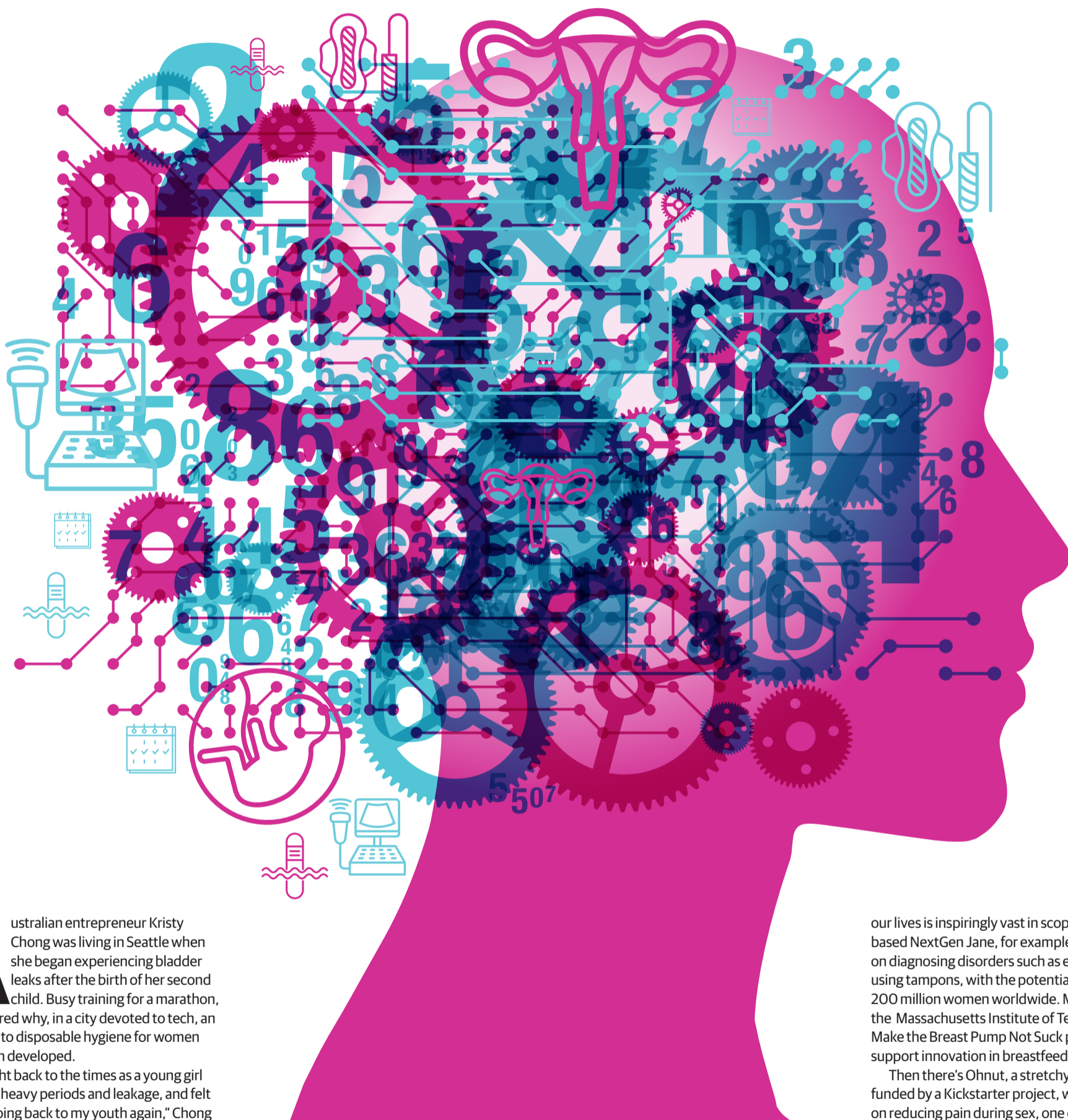


The rise of FEMTECH

From diagnostic tampons to silent breast pumps, Rosie Mullender looks at the rise of technology designed with women's bodies in mind



Australian entrepreneur Kristy Chong was living in Seattle when she began experiencing bladder leaks after the birth of her second child. Busy training for a marathon, she wondered why, in a city devoted to tech, an alternative to disposable hygiene for women hadn't been developed.

"I thought back to the times as a young girl when I had heavy periods and leakage, and felt like I was going back to my youth again," Chong says. "Here I was, surrounded by tech brands, and there was no solution. I thought: 'Why can't my underwear support me?' Maybe it was time to develop a better solution — one that was a bit more high-tech and environmentally friendly."

So she launched Modibodi, reusable 'period pants' that replace the need for disposable hygiene. To which any woman who's had a period would say: 'Where have you been all my life?'

Chong is part of a new generation of female entrepreneurs working in 'femtech', creating technologies that are focused on improving women's health and address everything from menstruation to menopause.

In a world generally designed by and for men,

it's no surprise that this kind of technology is lagging behind — despite the global women's health market being valued at over \$58 billion.

In her book *Invisible Women*, activist Caroline Criado Perez details the myriad ways women's health can suffer due to this disparity — like the average office is five degrees too cold for women because the standard temperature was based on the needs of a middle-aged male; women's heart attacks are more likely to go untreated; and the effects of alcohol on 'female Viagra' were tested on mostly male subjects.

According to Chong, while there may be

funding for femtech, a lot of would-be entrepreneurs don't know what's out there. "I went through an Australian program called Springboard, which is focused on tech, and that changed my outlook on what my company could be — and I think that's what more women need to be looking to do," she says. "I think it's about educating women, especially mums who have unique ideas."

Meet the innovators

If the opportunities out there are taken, the potential for femtech entrepreneurs to change

our lives is inspiringly vast in scope. California-based NextGen Jane, for example, is working on diagnosing disorders such as endometriosis using tampons, with the potential to help 200 million women worldwide. Meanwhile, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Make the Breast Pump Not Suck project aims to support innovation in breastfeeding tech.

Then there's Ohnut, a stretchy wearable funded by a Kickstarter project, which focuses on reducing pain during sex, one of a slew of products that aim to increase women's sexual pleasure.

With an average of five times as many studies being conducted into erectile dysfunction as PMS, the developments represent a very welcome shift in focus.

Ida Tin, who is credited with coining the word 'femtech', is the CEO and co-founder of period-tracking app Clue. The app allows women to record physical and emotional cues as well as track their cycles, joining a number of femtech products designed to help women understand their bodies better.

"When women understand their bodies, they can better navigate the world," Tin says.