



Vancouver Women's Health Collective

HER VOICE

Spring 2001

Collective Process: What it Means for the VWHC

Many different philosophies exist to bring "employees" and "employers" together in order to take care of the business at hand. Is working collectively an effective way of facilitating day-to-day work to meet the goals of an organization? For close to thirty years, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective (VWHC), in different ways, has been asking this question. With currently twenty-one active volunteers and three paid part-time employees we surmise, yes, working in a collective fashion is effective. And, is the basis of the overall health of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.

Working collectively means no hierarchy. We recognize that each member of the collective, whether volunteer or paid employee, has

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Menopause Naturally

It's been estimated that over 60 million women will be menopausal in North America by the year 2010 -- talk about global warming!

But seriously, as we enter the new millennium women all over the world are living longer, healthier lives. As children grow-up and leave home, and with, perhaps, a less demanding work schedule, many women find the transition through mid-life a joyous and life-affirming experience; a time for personal growth and self-discovery. After years of juggling career and family, and getting caught up in the daily stresses of modern life,

"Menopause is a natural, biological event -- not an estrogen deficiency disease. Many women report feeling more confident, empowered, involved, and energized than in younger years."

*-North American
Menopause Society*

there is finally an opportunity to shift gears and take a closer look at what is important to your well-being.

With all of the negative media messages bombarding women we may sometimes feel that we are suffering from a horrible disease and that the only way to end the suffering is to medicate menopausal symptoms.

There is sometimes pressure to conform to a regimen of hormonal replacement therapy -- to "replace" the missing hormones in our bodies -- as if we are somehow lacking or in a state of disease. Amongst all of this negative stereotyping and hype, it is important to remember that menopause is not a disease! It is a completely natural physiological process that is part of a woman's normal biological rhythm.

Does Menopause = Menopausal Symptoms?

Not every woman experiences the unwanted side effects we normally associate with menopause. In fact, some experience a very smooth transition in which the only noticeable change is a cessation of menses. The

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something unique and of value to contribute. As well, each woman possesses an area of expertise, which she can bring to the VWHC to help it achieve its goals. Perceived power imbalances do occur when members feel they are unable to voice their opinions or concerns. Therefore, our meetings include "rounds". Rounds are simply taking time to check-in with each woman at the meeting to hear what her view is on an issue. Rounds are an opportunity for consensus-building and allow everyone involved to contribute to the overall decision-making that helps the VWHC grow.

An important part of working collectively -- something that is valued in our organization -- is the recognition of the challenges, stresses and joys of women's lives. Our personal lives do effect our work life. It is essential to an organization's health to find time, in a balanced way, to discuss the personal things that contribute to, or take away from, our work. Using rounds in meetings has been effective in

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healthier a woman is as she approaches menopause, the more likely she is to pass through this phase in her life with minimal discomfort. According to Chinese medicine, the severity of menopausal symptoms depends on the pre-existing condition of her kidney qi (energy). Overwork, a poor diet, and high levels of stress will weaken the kidneys/adrenal function and worsen symptoms. Diet and prevention can minimize or prevent symptoms from occurring.

**How Does Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)
View Menopause?**

In Chinese medical theory, the kidneys are seen as the foundation of life and longevity. Aging is thought to be due to a decline in kidney essence or energy. The kidneys contain a vital form of energy. In men this vital essence is stored in the sperm. In women, it is stored in the ovum. Part of the kidney essence is also utilized to form menstrual blood.

In terms of acupuncture meridians, two channels are particularly important in the regulation of a woman's physiology. The penetrating vessel controls menstruation and the directing vessel controls the uterus. These two vessels originate in the kidneys. Together they regulate a woman's menstrual cycle; one controls the blood and the other the qi. An acupuncturist will quite often choose points that influence these two vessels to treat problems relating to conception, fertility, menstrual irregularities and menopause.

The changes that occur in these channels determine the hormonal changes that a woman experiences. The Chinese believe that these changes occur naturally in 7-year cycles. At 14 the directing vessel circulates strongly and menses comes at regular intervals, and at 49 the two vessels undergo a reversal in flow and menstruation stops. This correlates with the average age of menopause of 51.4 years for women in Western countries.

According to TCM, a woman's reproductive power is stored in her ovaries, which is controlled by the kidney essence. At menopause, the most important change is the decline of kidney energy and the depletion and reversal of the directing/penetrating vessels. Just as the sperm in

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men contains large amounts of vital energy, the eggs and menstrual blood in women contain large reserves of a woman's vital energy. A man is said to age more quickly if he is oversexed; expends too much of his vital energy which is lost due to ejaculation of the sperm. Luckily for us, a woman does not age according to her sexual activity, rather childbirth and excessive loss of menstrual blood is said to speed up the aging process.

Menopause can, therefore, be viewed as an energy conservation mechanism in which vital energy is conserved in the body instead of being depleted through monthly ovulation and menstruation. Rather than having a monthly period, which drains kidney vitality, the flow of energy is reversed in the center of the body and blood and essence are directed up to the heart in order to nourish the spirit. At this time a woman is believed to undergo a change from mother to her biological children, to mother of the community. This is why in many cultures, women who have passed through menopause are regarded as respected elders of the community, since their heart spirit is now nourished and enlightened in a way it was not before.

Is Hormone Replacement Necessary?

During menopause, the female sex hormone estrogen, produced mainly by the ovaries, is gradually decreasing and the adrenals begin making estrogens and androgens to replace it. In a well-nourished, vibrant woman, the adrenals and other glands take over the job of estrogen production. The adrenals secrete androstenedione which aids in the conversion of oestrone from fatty tissue. Taking estrogen replacement therapy discourages the adrenals from fully developing their estrogen producing capacity.

An estimated 60 to 80% of women on hormone replacement therapy end up stopping, either because they are unable to tolerate it, or because they believe it does not work.

Who Should Consider Hormone Replacement Therapy?

Women at high risk for osteoporosis or those who already have significant bone loss should consider the benefits of hormone therapy. A woman

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facilitating this process. Ongoing discussion about how we work together has also been instrumental. So, with a Steering Committee working together to direct the course of the VWHC, and volunteers and members committed to the process of working collectively, we continually move ahead. We carry our strengths and evaluate our weaknesses to achieve our goal – Helping Women Help Themselves!

Angela J. Gray is the CHA Coordinator and one of three part-time staff at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.



The VWHC will be releasing its up-dated Menopause Kit this summer.

Please call
604-736-5262
for more information.

The VWHC will be hiring a student this summer, if federal government funding is approved. Among other responsibilities, the student will staff the Information Centre, assisting women with their search for health information, as well as assisting the CHA Coordinator with health-related research. The position involves 12 weeks of work at 30 hrs/wk and the rate of pay is \$14 an hour. To be eligible, you must be returning to school full-time this fall. Please call 604-736-4234 for more information.

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can determine her risk based on her family medical history and by having baseline bone densitometry performed. This can be reviewed yearly to gauge whether hormone replacement therapy is necessary or not.

Hormone replacement therapy is not advised for women at high risk for breast cancer, for women with unexplained uterine bleeding, or for those with certain liver and gall bladder diseases. For these women, a combination of diet, exercise, botanical medicines, and acupuncture treatment can offer similar benefits to hormone replacement therapy without the associated risks.

A woman may decide to taper off hormone replacement therapy and switch to alternative treatments. In this case, she may want to continue hormone replacement therapy and reduce the dose slowly over a period of one to two months, as the herbal therapies require this time to build up in the body before taking full effect. As an alternative, Chinese medicine can promote the adrenals -- kidney essence -- to produce more estrogen. This is especially true when lifestyle and diet have prematurely worn out a woman's adrenals.

What are Some Natural Alternatives?

A doctor of Chinese medicine will prescribe individualized botanical supplements that are formulated to specifically treat each woman according to her menopausal symptoms and her underlying basic constitution. In this way, the symptoms most bothersome to the woman, whether it be hot flashes, insomnia, night sweats, headaches, inability to concentrate, anxiety, depression, weight gain, etc., can be treated.

At the same time, a woman may correct any underlying organ deficiencies or imbalances present in her body. Concerns regarding breast cancer, osteoporosis, and heart disease can also be discussed and evaluated at this time and, if appropriate, herbal formulas can be adjusted to include herbs that inhibit cancer, strengthen bones, lower cholesterol, or prevent cardiovascular degeneration.

Traditional Chinese Medicine balances the body in a slower and gentler way than hormone replacement therapy, therefore you have to be aware that results may not be instant, but will build over the course of treat-

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ment. Chinese medicine gently, but steadily, builds the adrenals/kidney essence, without negative side effects. Even for women unfortunate enough to experience some unpleasant side effects of menopause, these symptoms can be eased or eliminated with the use of natural remedies.

Some women may choose to use both hormone replacement therapy and Traditional Chinese Medicine concurrently. Both therapies can be used to complement one another as each works in a markedly different way. Hormone replacement therapy "tricks" the body into thinking it is ovulating and provides immediate relief from symptoms, but does not tonify the body. TCM builds and supplements the kidney energy with herbs and acupuncture, and will reduce or eliminate symptoms more gradually.

How to Make an Informed Choice?

Each woman should evaluate her specific situation and consider the risks as well as the benefits of both hormone replacement therapy and alternative treatments. Because each woman is unique, no one intervention is appropriate for all women.

Dr. Jennifer Kelly T.C.M.D. is a certified member of the Acupuncture Association of BC and has a Master of Science Degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine from the American College of TCM, San Francisco, CA. For more information about menopause, acupuncture, herbal medicine, and diet/nutritional therapy please contact Dr. Jennifer Kelly at 604-786-5671.

Are you interested in...

Doing research on complementary therapies, reproductive issues, or endometriosis? Knowing about the health resources available to you in your community? Finding a new doctor or therapist? Hosting a Patient's Rights workshop for women in your organization? Inviting the VWHC to your meeting to do a breast health workshop?

Then please call our health information line: 604-736-5262 or visit our Health Information Centre at 1 - 175 East 15th Avenue in Vancouver.

Staffed exclusively by volunteers, the information centre is open:
Monday through Thursday
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Monday and Tuesday
3:00 to 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.



Women: Make Your Vote Count!

Please Join Us at the Women's Issues Forum!

It's your opportunity to ask politicians what their party's position is on health care funding, pharmacare, access to abortion, poverty and the many other important issues facing women in the upcoming BC Election.

Thursday, May 3, 7 pm

Vancouver Technical
Secondary School
Auditorium

2600 East Broadway
Vancouver

The 52% Coalition is a diverse group of women's organizations, individual women, and social justice groups in BC. The coalition is making sure that women's equality and social justice issues are at the forefront of the 2001 BC provincial election. Please see the 52% Coalition's Pocket Guide outlining each party's position on the many issues facing BC women.

For more information call 604-255-6554 or visit www.vcn.bc.ca/fiftytwo

Lynn Redenbach is a Registered Psychiatric Nurse and is currently doing her Masters degree in Counselling Psychology. She received her Bachelor degree from Anitoch University, Seattle where she did research into and worked with women who have eating disorders. Lynn has been working in the counselling field for seventeen years, eight of which have been in private practice where she works from feminist informed theories.

Lynn provides individual and relationship therapy, teaches numerous workshops, presentations and seminars, offers consultation services, and facilitates groups for those who have eating problems. Much of Lynn's work and research has been focused on applying The Stone Center's Relational Cultural Model in clinical work with persons whose lives have been impacted by disordered eating. Lynn has also worked extensively in the addictions and trauma fields. As a result of her varied background, Lynn often works with individuals holistically, addressing the multiple relationships and experiences people bring to therapy.

Lynn Redenbach, B.A., R.P.N.
Individual and Relationship Therapy
604-460-1802

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective

Our Purpose

We have all been taught that only medical experts know about good health care. In fact, health information has been passed down from one generation of women to the next for centuries. Since our founding in 1972, the VWHC has promoted and supported women helping women to help themselves.

Our Mission Statement

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective provides information, resources and other support for women to empower themselves to take charge of their own health care.

Our Members

We are a charitable, non-profit women's organization, funded primarily by donations, membership fees, grants, and fund-raising initiatives. Volunteer members are an essential part of the VWHC. There are many opportunities for volunteers to share their stories and enhance their skills. Please call us for more information. Many thanks to past and present volunteers and members, without you we would not be here!

HER VOICE

Our re-vamped newsletter -- HER VOICE -- made its appearance in January 2001. HER VOICE will be published up to three times a year. HER VOICE is a forum to connect VWHC members, as well as the broader community, around women's health issues and activities at the VWHC. Submissions relevant to women's health and/or well-being are always welcome.

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the VWHC.

The VWHC marked "Prevention of Violence against Women" week with an April 23rd gathering to discuss collective process and other Health Information Centre matters. Thank-you to the Ministry of Women's Equality for providing the financial support for this workshop and for the funding for the VWHC to create and distribute the attractive VWHC Helping Women Help Themselves! magnet.

***Vancouver Women's
Health Collective***



Health Information Line: 604-736-5262

Helping Women Help Themselves!



Yes, I want to help women access quality health information!

I would like to join the VWHC would like to renew my VWHC membership

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____
(street)

_____ (city/province) _____ (postal code)

VWHC membership category: Fee enclosed: \$ _____

- Volunteer pay what you can up to \$25/yr
- Associate \$10-\$25/yr
- Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business \$50/yr

All VWHC Members

- receive the VWHC's newsletter and invitations to special events
- may participate at the monthly Steering Committee meeting & the AGM
- support the mission statement, values, and goals of the VWHC

Volunteer Members

- expected to volunteer at the information centre & attend one bingo shift

Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business Member

- entitled to a business card ad in HER VOICE

I wish to make a donation to the VWHC (*a charitable tax receipt will be issued*) \$ _____

Full amount of my membership fee and donation \$ _____

Thank you for your support!



Contact Us

1 - 175 East 15th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5T 2P6

health information line: 604-736-5262

fax: 604-876-1282

e-mail: vwhc@vcn.bc.ca

administration line: 604-736-4234

Thank you to our
2000/2001 Funders!

BC Ministry of Women's Equality
Vancouver/Richmond Health Board

BC Gaming Commission

VWHC Members & Donors