



Vancouver Women's Health Collective

HER VOICE

Spring 2006

Are you interested in...

Doing research on holistic therapies, reproductive issues, endometriosis, or the social issues that impact women's health? Knowing about the health resources available to you in your community? Finding a new doctor or therapist? Inviting the VWHC to do a Patient's Rights workshop for your group?

Then please call **604-736-5262**, visit our Health Information Centre at **225 – 119 West Pender Street** in Vancouver, or check out our web site: www.womenshealthcollective.ca

Staffed by volunteers, the VWHC's Information Centre is open:

- Mondays and Wednesdays
3:00 to 7:00 p.m.
- Fridays
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The VWHC moved on June 1, 2005...

You can now find us at 225 – 119 West Pender Street in Vancouver.

34 Years of Women Helping Women to Help Themselves!



Some VWHC collective members including Belinda Shelton, Hillary Quinn, Sonya Parmar, Farnaz Houshmand (back row), Lisa Moore, Lesia Hnatiw, Valerie Farina (front row).

Photo taken by Caryn Duncan

We are women who value women's knowledge, support one another to take charge of our own health, and raise awareness and inspire action for the feminist advancement of women's health. We advocate for appropriate, quality health care for all women through the media, by meeting with elected officials, speaking out at community consultations, and as an active member of coalitions and committees. The VWHC's Information Centre has a great deal of information about every aspect of women's health. This edition of HER VOICE is devoted to the work of the VWHC and what we have to offer women. Please pay us a visit, give us a call, or e-mail us, and we'll help you with your health care.



The VWHC's Titbits on Women's Health

Are you looking for independent, useful information on women's health issues and health care access? Volunteers and staff carefully research and produce VWHC **Titbits**. The following **Titbits** on Women's Health are available at our Information Centre and on our web site www.womenshealthcollective.ca

- Depression
- Endometriosis
- Accessing Abortion
- Finding a New Doctor
- PharmaCare
- The BC Medical Services Plan

VWHC Menopause Kit

Are you looking for information about menopause so that you can make more informed choices about your health? Please contact us at 604-736-5262.

HER VOICE Contributors:

Caryn Duncan
Jane Harper
Farnaz Houshmand
Lesia Hnatiw
Lisa Moore
Hillary Quinn
Belinda Shelton

The Media is Listening (On Occasion)

Did you manage to catch the recent stories about the VWHC in the corporate media? A two-page article about our work appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper, August 6, 2005. The VWHC continues to be quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* and community newspapers regarding the ongoing debate around cosmetic surgery. As well, the *Georgia Straight* printed a letter by the VWHC about gender analysis and the November civic election. The *Tyee* and the *Vancouver Sun* both covered the proposed HIV/AIDS vaccine study of Vancouver women and included the VWHC's criticisms of the pharmaceutical industry in their stories. We also received modest, but decent coverage, of women's issues during the May 2005 provincial election. It's hard to get the media's attention, but occasionally they do follow up on our story suggestions, or call us for our comments on a story. We offer media a gendered analysis of the story as well as an informed opinion about the many issues surrounding women's health.

“...we have not won the battle. ...women on average earn 72 cents for every dollar a man earns. That means public policy decisions, like a rise in health-care premiums, will affect women differently.”

-Caryn Duncan, VWHC,
The Vancouver Sun,
August 6, 2005

The VWHC Advocates for Women

The VWHC advocates for appropriate, quality health care for women through the media, by meeting with elected officials, speaking out at community consultations, through the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, and as an active member of coalitions and committees like the 52% Coalition.

The VWHC raised objections with the College of Physicians and Surgeons regarding the role of BC doctors in performing cosmetic surgery when the surgery was won as a prize in events such as Vancouver's Extraordinary Makeover Event. Thanks, in part, to our work cosmetic surgery can no longer be offered as a prize in BC. We also objected to the False Creek Surgical Centres' 2004 cosmetic surgery *Yellow Pages* advertisement which was redesigned. The College received correspondence from the VWHC regarding Dr. Gabriel Y.S. Yong. 17 women have made sexual assault complaints to police against this doctor. Not a single woman chose the College's complaint process to address their mistreatment. We are still

waiting for the College to adequately address our concerns about this doctor and the College's ineffectual complaint process.

As well, we continue to highlight the provincial government's decision to cut 100% of core funding to the VWHC and the 36 other women's centres in BC. We have urged the government and opposition parties to restore this funding and re-establish a stand-alone Ministry of Women's Equality.

As with the May 2005 provincial and the November 2005 civic elections, the VWHC encourages its members, donors and all women to elect representatives who support and further women's equality.

Volunteer and Build our Women's Community

We believe that the best way to achieve our goals is to organize as a feminist collective. We rely on volunteers as steering committee members and Information Centre workers. More specifically, VWHC volunteers are women who are interested in ensuring that all women get appropriate and equitable health care. As a collective member you are part of a group that builds agreement through consensus. The more diverse our collective membership the closer we are to addressing the health care needs of all women.

Presently we are offering volunteer training twice a year in the Spring and Fall. Prior to attending the training, we ask women into the centre for an interview and a one-on-one discussion about volunteering with the VWHC.

We offer these volunteer opportunities:

- Providing one-on-one support for women who contact our Information Centre
- Maintaining our women's health information resources
- Doing community outreach
- Participating at rallies, forums, and community events
- Co-facilitating VWHC workshops
- Writing new health information fact sheets and articles for the newsletter
- Fundraising for the VWHC
- Helping to shape the direction of the VWHC through collective participation

If you are a woman who would like to contribute to the advancement of women's health with us, please contact Belinda at 604-736-5262 to set up an interview.

Are you Interested in Past Issues of HER VOICE?

You will find the VWHC's bi-annual newsletter, HER VOICE, on our web site. Past issues include:

- May 17, 2005 – Women Vote!, Spring 2005
- What is Primary Health Care and Why Does it Need Reforming?, January 2005
- UN Committee Critical of Cuts to Women's Programs in BC, Spring 2003
- Regaining Her Voice – Preventing Disordered Eating, January 2001

New VWHC Workshops

Beginning in the spring of 2006, in addition to the Patient's Rights workshop, the VWHC will be offering workshops on:

- Menopause
- Young Women's Sexuality and Body Image



New Books at the VWHC Resource Library

Come for a visit and check out these new books:

The Complete Natural Medicine Guide To Women's Health

By Dr. Sat Dharam Kaur, Dr. Mary Danylak-Arhanic, and Dr. Carolyn Dean

"This book provides clear information on integrating natural medicine treatments into healing and wellness programs that meet the distinctive needs of women."

Estrogen's Storm Season

By Dr. Jerilynn Prior

"This novel begins as eight frustrated women – from all walks of life – meet Dr. Kailey Madrona, a woman specialist. All are in perimenopause, the long and chaotic transition to menopause."

Learning to Defend our Rights as Patients: The VWHC's Patient's Rights Workshop

"How many of you took your children to the doctor the last time they were sick?" A sea of hands shoots up. "And how many of you went to the doctor yourselves the last time you were sick?" Most hands drop, and only a few remain. The women look around at each other and shake their heads in recognition of the problem: women face many barriers to health care. We prioritize the health of others over our own, and we even avoid seeking care for a number of reasons. With this exercise, the **Patient's Rights workshop** begins.

Lack of childcare and adequate transit are among the many reasons why women don't seek care. But even under the best of circumstances, going to the doctor can be an intimidating, disempowering experience. The power differential between doctor and patient is great. When other dynamics are added in - including gender, language, age and race - it becomes obvious why so many women feel that they do not have a real voice in their own health care. Many women don't know that we have rights as patients. And even if we are aware of these rights, it can be hard to act on them.

The **Patient's Rights workshop** breaks through these barriers. Through the workshop, women share their experiences on topics including where to go for care, social factors that affect women's health, BC's Medical Services Plan, and the rights of all patients in Canada's health care system.

In addition to gaining new information, the workshop helps women develop the confidence they need to advocate for themselves. After talking about their rights to disagree with a medical practitioner, demand clear explanations, and maintain traditional health practices, participants act out scenarios where these rights are put to the test. With some creativity, courage and laughter a powerful transformation takes place: women practice standing up for their rights, and gain confidence in their ability to do so in real life.

Every month, dozens of women - many of whom are recently arrived immigrants - participate in the VWHC's **Patient's Rights workshop**. In the words of one workshop participant, "I feel more secure now that I know how to defend my rights."

"I know my rights against doctors now. I know that I can ask for more time and for clear explanations. I know so much more now than I did before the Patient's Rights workshop."

-Patient's Rights Workshop Participant

"I always say that information is power. If you know your rights, you have the power to do anything. After this workshop, I know the women in my program have more confidence to get the health care they need. I know it made a difference."

-Patient's Rights Workshop Participant and Immigrant Women's Program Coordinator

The VWHC's Information Centre Director and volunteers are available to present the **Patient's Rights workshop** for groups of women throughout the Lower Mainland. The workshop uses feminist popular education techniques and lasts two to three hours. Please call Lisa at 604-736-5262 to book a **Patient's Rights workshop**.

A Patient's Rights

Many women do not know that they have rights within the health care system. As a patient, you have legal rights that are based on Canadian laws and court decisions.

As a Patient you Have the Right to:

- have a friend or family member with you during your appointment and examination
- be treated with dignity and respect
- ask questions about your health
- receive good explanations that you can understand
- disagree with your health care provider
- get a second opinion
- say no to, or refuse, treatment
- have access to your medical records and read them
- enjoy confidentiality and privacy
- decide the future of your health care
- change doctors

Your Doctor Should:

- listen to you
- pay attention to what is happening in your life
- touch you in a gentle and professional manner during a physical exam
- ask you if what they are doing is uncomfortable or hurts
- explain what they are doing
- ask if you'd like a female nurse present in the room, if the doctor is male
- accept your lifestyle
- not make assumptions about your life
- accept your use of complementary or traditional treatment
- keep what you tell them private and confidential
- return phone calls in a reasonable amount of time

“As a participant, but also an organizer, I really appreciated the approach taken by (the VWHC facilitator) with the topic of patient's rights. She made it fun and participatory and made us reflect on our health and what is important to us. I learned that we have more rights than we thought and the role play put us in situations where we could challenge the “doctor” and demand our rights. As a woman with Latin American background, we are often taught that doctors are infallible and God-like and that we can't question them. We also are made to believe that we do not know our own bodies...but we do. I have been made to feel often that I am paranoid and don't know what is best for me. In Canada, we still have a good health care system, but at the same time, some things need to be improved such as quality care given by family doctors in terms of taking time to talk to their patients. These kind of workshops help us all to advocate for a better system, one that the respects the whole person and not just the symptoms.”

*-Patient's Rights
Workshop Participant and
Family Support Worker*

Coffeehouse Fundraiser a Success!

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective hosted a very successful coffeehouse fundraiser at Our Town Café, on November 26, 2005. The evening featured a number of talented local female performers who entertained us with spoken word, hip-hop, folk and classical music, stand-up comedy and more. These women performed for a packed house and we raised over \$250. Not only did the event raise money and create an opportunity to showcase local female talent, but it was also a great way to share information about the VWHC with women. Keep an eye out for our next event. We are hoping to host an evening of music and performance in March for International Women's Day.



On the Street

In May 2005, volunteers at the VWHC started a new outreach and fundraising initiative, **On the Street**. Initially, the idea stemmed from the need to focus more time and energy on fundraising to keep our doors open, after the provincial government cut our core funding on April 1, 2004.

On the Street has now become a way for us to be more visible in various communities and let women know about the resources that we provide at our Information Centre. What is **On the Street**? Two or three volunteers set up a small information table at a strategic location and hand out our brochures and other information to women passing by. The experience has been very positive. Many women who have never heard of us are quite happy to find out that the VWHC is fighting for appropriate, quality health care for all women. Not only women, but men, also stop and acknowledge the importance of our centre by making a donation.

Keep your eyes open for us in your neighbourhood. When you do see us, please drop by our information table and show your support!

Are you Looking for a Doctor, Midwife, or Counsellor?

The VWHC's **Health Practitioner & Therapist Directory** lists BC health practitioners who are accepting new patients by gender, city and region.

Our directory includes dentists, chiropractors, massage therapists, family doctors, specialists, psychiatrists, counsellors, psychologists, naturopaths, midwives, doulas, physiotherapists, and more.

Women may also review our files on health practitioners and therapists. These files are made up of evaluation forms that women have completed regarding their experiences with a health practitioner or therapist. In some cases, the file also contains a questionnaire completed by the practitioner about her/his services.

Our **Health Practitioner & Therapist Directory** is available to women who visit our Information Centre. We do not make recommendations or referrals, rather we provide women with information so that they may find a health practitioner or therapist that meets their specific needs. Our goal is to empower women by sharing information about women's experiences.

Share Your Experience with Other Women

Would you like to share your experience with a health practitioner or therapist with other women? Do you have a great doctor who is accepting new patients that you'd like to tell women about? Have you been badly treated by a health practitioner and you want other women to know about this experience? You can find the evaluation forms on our web site www.womenshealthcollective.ca, or at our Information Centre. Please take the time to complete an evaluation form and help us build our **Health Practitioner & Therapist Directory**.

“While I was waiting for my biopsy after my first mammogram, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective provided support and information that helped me to find some peace of mind at a scary time. They did so promptly and with care. They were a help and comfort to me and I am very grateful for that.”

-VWHC Information Centre Visitor

“I'm really interested in the VWHC's (health practitioner evaluation) files. It's so important to have a place where we can go to write down what we like and don't like about our doctors. I'm going to use that information to find a new doctor.”

-Patient's Rights Workshop Participant

Why Not Pay us a Visit and Check out our Women's Health Files

The VWHC has a comprehensive collection of health files on a wide range of health topics and women's issues. The content of these files has been accumulated over 30 years and is categorized in over 20 main topics. Each topic has been further divided into various subtopics in order to make the information easily accessible. These topics include reproductive health, menopause, abortion, depression and other psychological issues, cancer, pregnancy and giving birth, HIV/AIDS, addiction, holistic therapies and much more. The collection is a rich source of information and all women are encouraged to come to our Information Centre and use this amazing resource.



VWHC Volunteers Nancy Arbuah and Hillary Quinn respond to a woman's health information request.

Photo taken by Lisa Moore

“I am a new immigrant and didn't have a CareCard. I was having problems with my husband and couldn't ask him to sign me up. I had no one to ask for help and support. I had phoned government offices and was just told that I would have to ask my husband. I began to lose motivation and think “I can't do it.” Not having a CareCard, I was really insecure and depressed. I knew that everyone has a right to health care, but I couldn't get it. Then I participated in a VWHC workshop, where I learned about my rights. After the workshop, I went to the VWHC Information Centre to talk more about my situation. The volunteer there listened to me and encouraged me. It was a supportive and understanding environment – so much different than talking to a man in a government office! These were women who could understand where I was coming from. They gave me advice and worked hard to get information for me. In the end, I felt so much better. I knew what I needed to do and felt much stronger than before. Now I have my CareCard and I feel safer and more secure. Now I finally feel like I'm accepted in this country as an immigrant woman.”

*-Patient's Rights Workshop
Participant and VWHC
Information Centre Visitor*

Upcoming Events

International Women's Day

- **IWD Conference**
Sunday, March 5 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. &
IWD Rally
Wednesday, March 8 at 5:30 p.m.
Please contact Grassroots Women for more information at 604-682-4451, or grassrootswomen@telus.net
- **IWD March & Rally**
Saturday, March 4
- Gather at Commercial & Broadway at 11:00 pm
- Rally at Granville Park at noon
Please call 604-708-0447 for more information
- **IWD Dinner**
Wednesday, March 8
Please contact the VDLC Women's Committee for more information at 604-254-0703
- **IWD Evening of Celebration**
Please contact the VWHC for more information at 604-736-5262, or vwhc@vcn.bc.ca

International Day of Action for Women's Health - May 28

Please contact the VWHC for more information at 604-736-5262, or vwhc@vcn.bc.ca



Please Contact Us

The VWHC moved on June 1, 2005. You can now find us at 225 - 119 West Pender Street (between Beatty & Abbott Streets) Vancouver, BC, V6B 1S5
tel: 604-736-5262
e-mail: vwhc@vcn.bc.ca

The VWHC's Hours of Operation

Monday 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Friday 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

How do I get to the VWHC by Bus or Skytrain?

Skytrain

Get off at the Stadium Station
Take either exit, and then walk one block north to West Pender St.

Buses

#4 UBC, #4 Downtown,
#7 Nanaimo, #22 Macdonald,
#19 Stanley Park (exit on West Pender St. at Abbott St.)

#17 Oak, #15 Cambie (exit on West Pender Street at Cambie St. and walk two blocks east)

#10 Hastings, #16 29th Avenue Station, #20 Victoria, #135 SFU (exit on Hastings Street at Abbott St. and walk one block south)

For more information:
www.translink.bc.ca

Funding Stress & Strain

Lack of funds continues to constrain the Vancouver Women's Health Collective. The City of Vancouver provided us with much needed financial support after the provincial government cut 100% of our core funding in April 2004. This followed the loss of our Vancouver Coastal Health Authority funding the previous year. Our city funding is under annual review and we are not confident that it will be maintained at present levels for the coming year. This is putting even greater pressure on the VWHC to cut back.

Our June 1, 2005, move resulted in substantial savings in rent and utilities. The two greatest costs any community organization faces are rent and salaries. With only two part-time staff, it is hard to envision how we can cut back any further. We are always grateful for donations and can provide a charitable tax receipt. You can also support us by becoming a VWHC member. We continue to apply for project funding through various foundations. It is, however, our fundamental belief that all levels of government should support the important work of community organizations like the Vancouver Women's Health Collective. We will always advocate for core government funding for our work.

We hope that we are not going to follow other women's and community organizations that have already closed their doors. Please contact Caryn at 604-736-4234 if you would like to help us out with a donation, or if you'd like to become a member please see our web site.

2005/06 VWHC Funders

City of Vancouver, Community Services Grant
BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Gaming Policy
VWHC Members & Donors
Summer Career Placement Program, HRSDC

Please check out our web site for lots of women's health information:
www.womenshealthcollective.ca

