



Vancouver Women's Health Collective

HER VOICE

Spring 2007

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Please check out our new web site:
www.womenshealthcollective.ca

The VWHC is Exploring the Possibility of Owning & Operating a Women's Pharmacy in the DTES

by the VWHC's Pharmacy Committee: Beth Pentney, Farnaz Houshmand and Caryn Duncan

The VWHC has embarked on an exciting new project. We are investigating the opportunities that social enterprise – a women's pharmacy – may provide our organization and the women of Vancouver.

As we undertook this work, we realized that this new venture represents a return to our roots, in many ways. The VWHC began in 1971 in response to the frustration felt by women whose health care needs were not being met by their doctors and the health care system in general. These original members gathered to share information and voice their concerns in a supportive environment, as well as to organize politically for change.

Part of their work included establishing a clinic and counselling centre for women, run by lay staff and volunteers, where women received diaphragm and cervical cap fitting, birth control counselling, abortion counselling, and access to a weekly gynecological clinic. One of our founding members describes the VWHC clinic this way:

"The really amazing reality of that time, was that a group of us trained ourselves to be paramedics and run our own GYN clinic. To legitimize it we always had a doctor on hand. But the patients were actually seen by a pair of our self-trained paramedics. We would take the case history, do a Pap test and VD test, check the ovaries, do a breast exam, and teach cervical self-exam. Sometimes we fit diaphragms or did pregnancy testing. The exams lasted a minimum of one hour and the doctor was only called in at the very end to recheck the pelvic exam and sometimes the breast exam and to answer any questions. They were also called into the room for anything unusual that came up. But the main point was that it was the lay VWHC self-help paramedics that did the exams, taught birth control etc. Which was pretty amazingly

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A Good Fit: Incorporating the VWHC's Information Centre into a Women's Pharmacy

All of us at the Vancouver Women Health Collective are looking forward to opening our pharmacy later this year. After months of brainstorming and hard work, our women's pharmacy is becoming a reality. We have envisioned our pharmacy to be one-of-the-kind in that it will be focused on women's health issues and needs. Our goal is to serve all women in Vancouver with quality health care. In addition to prescriptions, we will also provide products which are important for women's health. Our pharmacy will offer other services such as pap smears and mammograms. We hope that women take advantage of the friendly environment and our experienced volunteers and enjoy this unique experience. Also, the VWHC's Information Centre will be run parallel to the pharmacy, making it accessible to all women who visit our pharmacy. Our ultimate goal is to improve women's quality of life and empower them to take charge of their health.

from page 2... **Pharmacy**

radical at that time... We ran that weekly clinic for quite a few years. In the beginning we learned from supportive doctors, we even did our own lab tests, pregnancy tests etc. Later on we trained our own clinic workers and passed our skills on that way..."

During the 1980s, the clinic closed and the VWHC focused on providing information and resources for women. Today, we are ready to return to providing women with health care service through a women's pharmacy. In addition to accessing their medication in a non-judgmental setting, women will also have access to community resources, health information, the VWHC's Practitioner & Therapist Directory, and a supportive environment run by trained volunteers.

A Unique Idea: A Women's Pharmacy

In the fall of 2006, the VWHC worked with a student intern from SFU, Danielle, who conducted research for us by searching for other women's pharmacy models from which we could gain some insight. Her results were perhaps not surprising: she was unable to find any other women's pharmacies in North America. Upon extending her search to include women's clinics, Danielle was only able to come up with a handful of clinics that were women-run and women-centred. Moreover, most of the women's clinics she identified specifically deal with women's reproductive health, rather than primary health care. We see this gap as an opportunity to create a women's pharmacy that will serve a real need for women in the downtown eastside of Vancouver by providing a level of care not otherwise available to all women, and to act as a model for other women's organizations.



Frances, a VWHC volunteer, at the March 2007, IWD Rally

HPV Vaccine & Cervical Cancer

by *Sonya Parmar*

The fight against cervical cancer continues even today. It is still the second leading gynecological cancer faced by women in North America. According to the Canadian Women's Health Network, this year 1,400 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and, sadly, of these women 420 will lose their fight.

Due to this unsettling prevalence, prevention of cervical cancer has become a hot topic in women's health. Central to this issue is the new vaccine which protects women against infection from the human papillomavirus that is responsible for 70% of cervical cancer cases. This vaccine is recommended for girls and women aged 9-26. It is believed this age group is the best cohort for this vaccine because it is during this time period that most women become sexually active, thus are at greatest risk for contracting the virus. The vaccine is administered by your family doctor and consists of three separate treatments. The cost for the full vaccination is approximately \$360, at a cost to the patient, but may be partially covered by some personal health insurance plans.

Since the 1950s, prevention of cervical cancer has focused mainly on regular screening for precancerous and cancerous cells through Pap exams provided by your family doctor. Amongst the different cancers, cervical cancer is one of the easiest to prevent, recognize and cure simply by visiting your doctor for regular Pap exams that are fully covered under the BC Medical Services Plan. Even the pharmaceutical company that produces the HPV vaccine, Gardasil, recommends that women have a regular Pap exam in conjunction with the vaccine because the vaccine cannot protect women from all types of cervical cancer.

Why are such a large number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, if it is a preventable disease? The answer lies in the fact that of these diagnosed women, 50% never visited their doctors for regular Pap exams. The importance of a regular Pap exam cannot be over emphasized. If you are considering being vaccinated for HPV, information is available from the Canadian Women's Health Network's web site: www.cwhn.ca, or you can contact your family doctor. In the meantime, call your doctor and book your next Pap test. It just may save your life.

The VWHC's Titbits on Women's Health

Are you looking for independent, useful information about women's health?

You will find carefully researched and produced VWHC **Titbits** on our web site: www.womenshealthcollective.ca. These **Titbits** are also available at our Information Centre on a range of issues including the following:

- Taking Charge of Your Health
- Finding a New Doctor
- Accessing Abortion
- Patient's Rights
- Women's Heart Health
- Facts on Aboriginal Women's Health

HER VOICE Contributors:

Patrice Allen
Caryn Duncan
Farnaz Houshmand
Sonya Parmar
Beth Pentney
Mina Taheri



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? Have you been treated with disrespect by a doctor and want other women to know about your experience? You can find 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**.

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

The VWHC's **Health Practitioner & Therapist Directory** lists BC health providers from family doctors to chiropractors to midwives who are accepting new patients by gender, city and region. Our directory is available to women who visit our Information Centre at 225-119 West Pender Street in Vancouver. Please call us for more information, 604-736-5262.

The VWHC Welcomes Patrice Allen

I'm very excited to join the Vancouver Women's Health Collective as the new Information Centre Director. I'm dedicated to women's fight for equality and strongly believe the VWHC's mission, goals and activities provide the support women need to empower themselves.

I completed my MA in History with a focus on gender politics within African Diaspora Community in June 2006, and I'm involved with various women's organizations bringing to the VWHC extensive facilitation experience.



Patrice Allen, VWHC Information Centre Director

With the amazing support of committed volunteers, the VWHC offers workshops on:

- Patient's Rights: Taking Charge of Your Health
- Women and Depression
- Menopause: A Self-Care Approach, and
- Go Figure! A Workshop on Body Image for Young Women.

Additionally, with advance notice, the VWHC can develop new workshops and facilitate discussions on other women's health topics, for example, access to abortion, breast health, etc.

The VWHC's workshops are interactive and fun, and the content can be adapted in many ways to meet the needs of each particular group of women. The workshops can be done with translation to other languages, and can be conducted in a wide range of community settings.

Please contact me, Patrice Allen, at 604-736-5262 or icdvwhc@vcn.bc.ca to discuss the possibility of workshops on these or other women's health issues.

Are You Interested in Becoming a VWHC Volunteer?

by *Mina Taheri*

We, as a collective, encourage a wide range of women to join us at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective. We believe in diversity because our differences can bring us closer together and strengthen how we address women's health care. VWHC volunteers are the ones who make sure all women who contact us get proper health care and good health information.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective provides volunteers with opportunities to participate in rallies and community events, fundraise for the organization, and provide one-on-one support for women who contact the Information Centre. Moreover, volunteers can become part of the steering committee.

We offer volunteer training twice a year. Before attending the training, prospective volunteers are interviewed by a steering committee member or staff. If you are interested in contributing to the improvement of women's health care, please contact us at 604-736-5262 to set up an interview.

We would like to thank our new volunteers Amanda, Nadia, Rebecca and Sameerah who have recently joined us at the VWHC! They are dedicating their time to make us a stronger organization that better meets the needs of women.

VWHC 2006/07 Steering Committee Members



Mina Taheri, Farnaz Houshmand, Beth Pentney, and Sonya Parmar

VWHC gets Support to Archive its Herstory

The VWHC is excited to be a community partner in Simon Fraser University's Community Health Online Digital Archive Research Resource (CHODARR) project.

This collaborative project is digitizing materials and resources from several community health organizations located primarily in the downtown eastside, in order to create a database of shared material that will be available free, online. You can learn more about the CHODARR project at <http://health.arts.sfu.ca/index.html>.

The VWHC currently has an array of historical documents dating back to the 1970s, and the opportunity to archive this material and make it available to the community and researchers is long overdue. If you know of any former VWHC volunteers who may have material in their basements or stuffed away in a closet, will you please encourage them to contact Beth at 604-736-5262.



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.womenhealthcollective.ca**

Go Figure!

The VWHC is excited to announce its new workshop **Go Figure!** This workshop is for women aged 13-15 and focuses on issues related to body image and beauty. If you would like more information, please contact Patrice at 604-736-5262, or e-mail her at icdvwhc@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.

Please Let the Premier Know What You Think about the State of Women's Health Care in BC

A Conversation on Women's Health

Women's Voices: Community Response to Health & Wellbeing

Monday, May 28, 2007, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
at Heritage Hall (3102 Main Street, in Vancouver)
For more information please call: 604-736-5262

- 10-11 a.m.** Conversation on Women's Health:
Quality Housing & A Living Income
- 11-12 noon** Conversation on Women's Wellbeing:
What Health Services Do You Need?
- 1-3 p.m.** Conversation on Women's Health:
The Social Determinants of Health

To Commemorate *International Day of Action for Women's Health*

Organized by:
Vancouver Women's Health Collective
Women Against Violence Against Women
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society
Pacific Association of First Nation Women
BC Coalition of People with Disabilities

2006/07 VWHC Funders

City of Vancouver, Community Services Grant
BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Gambling Revenue
VWHC Members & Donors
HRSDC, Summer Career Placement Program
BC Women's Hospital
Enterprising Non-Profits

The VWHC is always searching for new funding. If you would like to make a donation to support our work, then please call 604-736-4234.