

Finding a New Doctor

Access to quality health care in BC has a lot to do with your primary health care provider. There are several things you can do to make sure that you get the kind of health care that you have a right to. Becoming informed of your rights and the services available to you will help you to make the best decisions when selecting a doctor. The relationship between a patient and a doctor is often based on an unequal balance of power, where a doctor is imagined to be an expert, and a patient is seen as unknowledgeable. It is important to keep in mind that a doctor is a RESOURCE, and not an AUTHORITY.

Every day the Vancouver Women's Health Collective receives calls from women who are looking for a new doctor. It can be difficult to find a new doctor, particularly a female doctor, who is accepting new patients. While women make up the majority of medical school graduates in Canada today, the medical field has traditionally been dominated by men. Currently men make up the majority of physicians and surgeons: 30% of practicing doctors and specialists are female, according to the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons. Women will not have access to health care that is fully invested in our well-being until that changes.

Things to consider when looking for a doctor:

- A family doctor, also known as a general practitioner, does routine checkups, can provide you with a referral to see a specialist (such as a gynecologist or a psychiatrist), and recommends treatment. It is a good idea to have a regular family doctor. This way your medical history is recorded in one place. Your doctor will be able to chart your health concerns over time to see if any patterns emerge. Having a doctor who knows who you are and knows your health history can make a huge difference in the quality of care you get.
- The Medical Services Plan (MSP), is the provincial health care insurance plan for residents of BC. All residents of BC are required to enroll in MSP, and pay premiums in order to access health care.
- Finding a doctor is a bit like interviewing someone for a job: you decide who is the best person for the job, based on a selection process. The VWHC has an up-to-date practitioner directory with listings of BC doctors accepting new patients, arranged by city and gender. For many of these doctors, we also have evaluations women have completed and contributed to our files. Come in to the information centre and make a list of potential doctors. Most doctors require an introductory meeting with you before they will schedule an appointment for a checkup or exam.
- What do you require from your doctor? Someone who practices near your home? Someone who is pro-choice? Someone interested in preventative and complementary medicine? Someone who is sensitive to your needs as a lesbian woman? A female doctor? Someone who speaks your language or has a similar cultural background? Someone who knows about addictions? Someone who can meet your needs as a disabled woman? Someone who will also be a doctor to your children? Make a list of things that you think are important, and be ready to ask a potential new doctor if they can meet your needs.

Titbits...on women's health



Please copy and distribute freely to women you know and work with.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective's *Titbits* are not intended to endorse or recommend particular treatments, explanations or products but rather to facilitate your own search for health resources. Please see your health practitioner for more information.

Meeting with a potential new doctor:

- When you meet with a potential doctor, bring a list of questions with you, and ask all of them. Consider things like: How long will it take to get an appointment? Does the doctor have a substitute when they are away or on vacation? Does the doctor work any evenings or weekends? Does the doctor have hospital visiting privileges, and if so, where?
- A new doctor should ask you about your health history, including your family's health history. You should be prepared to provide detailed information about your health and health concerns, as well as information about any extended benefits you might have in addition to MSP. While it is sometimes difficult to share personal information with a stranger, keep in mind that being direct with a potential new doctor will help you to determine whether or not they are right for you. A doctor does not have the right to discriminate based on sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, age, income, or education level.
- If you feel nervous or insecure about meeting with a doctor, bring someone with you. This person can help you keep track of what the doctor said after the meeting is over. Keep a record of your meeting.
- Find out how long your appointment with the doctor will be, and how long you can expect future appointments to be. If you feel like the doctor is not giving you enough time, ask if your appointments can be made longer.

Check out these resources at the VWHC:

- We maintain an up-to-date directory of doctors accepting new patients that you can use by coming to the VWHC during our information centre hours.
- We maintain a listing of BC doctors who have had disciplinary action taken against them.
- We have listings for a variety of support groups that are active in BC.
- We have information and listings for clinics and centres that provide free or low-cost medical, dental, and holistic or complementary services.

Resources in your community, if you do not have MSP:

Pine Free Community Health Clinic (free youth clinic, and serves people without MSP)
1985 West 4th Ave., Vancouver 604-736-2391

Bridge Community Health Clinic (free services for refugees)
2450 Ontario St., Vancouver 604-709-6540

Vancouver Native Health Society (free walk-in clinic, with or without MSP)
449 East Hastings, Vancouver 604-255-9766



Vancouver Women's Health Collective
#225-119 W. Pender Street Vancouver, BC V6B 1S5
Phone: 604-736-5262 E-mail: vwhc@vcn.bc.ca
Website: www.womenshealthcollective.bc.ca