

Community Health Advocate Project

of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective (VWHC)

Sharon Martin Community Health Initiative Fund
PROGRESS REPORT

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Submitted by : Angela J. Gray, *CHA Coordinator*

Phone : 736-4234 **Fax :** 876-1282

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Health Advocate Project (CHA) is an outreach project which focuses on helping women in the Vancouver/Richmond region to educate themselves about their rights within the health care system. CHA was developed to help women protect themselves against disrespect and abuse of any kind within the health care system.

GOALS OF CHA

- Provide information and support for women accessing the health care system.
- Identify the main issues and problems within the health care system for women in identified communities.
- Help women become the experts and decision-makers around their own health.

We accomplish these goals by providing the **Patient's Rights** workshop in identified communities. The participants of these workshops gain knowledge about what respectful health care is, and learn the skills to help themselves. The Patient's Rights workshop includes:

- an introduction about the VWHC
- information about what it means to access safe, respectful health care
- self-advocacy skills
- informed consent
- doctor's rights

Each workshop is tailored to the needs of the group. For example, the Patient's Rights workshop for Mental Health Consumers includes information about the Mental Health Act and Guardianship Legislation.

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The CHA project provides support and education for all women, but has identified and begun work with the following communities for the 2000/2001 fiscal year:

- MOSAIC -- Somalian women
- MOSAIC -- Kurdish women
- MOSAIC -- Latin American and Vietnamese women
- The Centre -- Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered women
- Pacific Immigrant Resource Society -- Immigrant women
- Downtown Eastside Women's Centre/V/RHB-DTE
- Sheway -- Aboriginal Women
- YWCA's Crabtree Corner -- Aboriginal women
- Mount Pleasant Family Centre -- Vietnamese and Chinese women
- Strathcona Mental Health Team
- Mental Health Network
- AIDS Vancouver
- Positive Women's Network
- BC Women's and Children's Hospital - First Nations Advocacy Program -- Aboriginal Women
- North Shore Women's Centre

Patient's Rights Workshops provided between April 1 and October 12, 2000

- BC Women's and Children's Hospital -- First Nations Advocacy Program May 19, 2000 -- full day workshop on advocacy skills for First Nations women who work as advocates on the reserves. ✓
- Mount Pleasant Family Place -- June 22, 2000 -- follow-up workshop on Patient's Rights within the hospital system for Vietnamese and Chinese women. ✓-19
- Women of the Downtown Eastside -- Patient's Rights workshop in partnership with Sheree Hudson of the V/RHB -- July 20, 2000.
- North Shore Women's Centre -- Patient's Rights workshop August 3, 2000 ✓
- MOSAIC -- Somalian women -- Patient's Rights workshop September 27, 2000
- MOSAIC -- Kurdish women -- Patient's Rights workshop October 6, 2000 (postponed until November 10, 2000)

Summer Student Highlights

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective provided work for a summer student through Human Resources Development Canada funding. Her time was spent working on the CHA project. Her accomplishments include:

- Developing a flyer insert, highlighting the CHA project, for the VWHC's pamphlet.
- Researching the following topics for the Patient's Rights Workshop:
 - doctor's rights
 - updates to the Medical Services Plan
 - hospital policies for the Lower Mainland
 - Mental Health Act/Guardianship Legislation
- Developing an information package for workshop participants.

CHA Project Profiled in the Community

- Attended the Sharon Martin Health Initiative Fund Memorial -- September 11
- The Vancouver Women's Health Collective Open House & AGM -- September 20

BARRIERS

- Due to the funding level for CHA, the coordinator works ten hours per week. This ten hours per week involves meeting with community partners to schedule workshops, developing and facilitating the workshops, administration of the project, community meetings, and participation in the overall duties of the VWHC. Lack of coordinator hours has placed limits on the time available to promote this worthwhile and viable project in the community.
- Lack of funding and a 10-hour work week, limit the coordinator's ability to have the workshop's written information and promotional materials translated into other languages for women who have difficulty reading English.
- Due to the large percentage of participants who use English as a second language, we have found that virtually no one fills out our evaluation forms. This has affected **written** documentation of the success of CHA.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND DIFFICULTIES

- The VWHC has applied to the Vancouver Foundation for additional funding for CHA.
- The VWHC plans on seeking a re-evaluation of the level of V/RHB funding for CHA.
- Through our work with MOSAIC and Pacific Immigration Resource Society, we hope to access their translation services in the future.
- We are currently in the process of developing an Evaluation Process that is inclusive and reflects the cultural and language challenges of all workshop participants.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

The VWHC Steering Committee has decided to reallocate funds within the CHA project budget to allow us to increase the Coordinators weekly hours of work and to allocate more funds towards project promotion.

EVALUATION PROCESS

We have found during the workshops, that women offer a great deal of feedback with regards to their experiences within the health care system. This information helps us to focus on areas of need in terms of workshop development. We also see this feedback as a part of the evaluation process and an affirmation of the CHA project. The participants have been quite generous in sharing their experiences because they want to know how to handle similar situations in the future. Confidentiality doesn't seem to be an issue because women have been meeting together for several months and seem to share a bond. Workshop participant's feedback shows us what additional information needs to be provided in the workshop and information package. For example, Somali women asked the following questions at their September 27th workshop:

- Are there midwives in Canada?
- Do we automatically have to have a Cesarean to deliver our babies?
- Can we get a second opinion from another doctor?
- How do we complain about a doctor?
- Where do we go for help if we aren't getting care from our doctor?
- Can we change doctors?
- What does Legal Aid offer?

We recognize that an effective evaluation process is essential in determining the success of this project. Due to the uniqueness of the clients served by CHA we have developed a three step process of evaluation for future workshops:

1. The community partner hosting the workshop will do their own evaluation and provide the VWHC with the results.
2. Rather than expecting women to complete written evaluations, the VWHC will develop a pictorial evaluation.
3. The VWHC will provide a follow-up workshop within two to four months, to gain feedback about the usefulness of information provided in the initial Patient's Rights workshop.

We feel this evaluation process, coupled with oral feedback during the workshop, will give us the qualitative and quantitative information required to evaluate the effectiveness, successes, and shortcomings of the CHA project.

CELEBRATION

Since the initial CHA project proposal to the V/RHB, we have seen employees and volunteers come and go. The vision of this project remains the same -- helping women access respectful health care -- as well as helping diminish violence against women within the health care system. As it is evolving, CHA is taking us there. We are proud of the work that has been done to create the Patient's Rights workshop. The Vancouver Women's Health Collective's CHA project is well received within the women's community and within the broader non-profit community. We have been welcomed by every organization that we have approached to partner with us. The Vancouver Women's Health Collective celebrates this and knows that we are achieving the success that we hoped for.