

**Community Health Advocate Project – Patient’s Rights Workshop**  
**Of the Vancouver Women’s Health Collective**  
**Funded by the Sharon Martin Community Health Initiative Fund**

**1. a) What is the impact of financial cut-backs (e.g. no increases to existing funding levels for the next three years, including increases associated with collective agreement wage lifts) on your project’s ability to provide funded services?**

Financial cut-backs to the CHA project will put further pressure on the project and the VWHC. Presently, the CHA project is granted \$16,800 annually and it is necessary that we carry out an aggressive fundraising strategy each year to secure a matching grant to deliver the project on a half-time basis. With \$16,800 the project provides for one staff person at 10 hours per week with about \$3,600 remaining to cover all other project costs. In 2001 we secured a matching grant from the Vancouver Foundation. The VWHC is not governed by a collective agreement.

**1. b) Will this cause significant problems to your program delivery? If so, how will you cope with the impending change?**

If the SMART grant for the CHA project is modestly reduced and we are able to secure matching funds then the project will continue. However, a reduction in our grant will have to be reported to the Canadian Women’s Foundation, we recently applied to the CWF for \$16,800 for 2002/2003, which may affect the success of the application. If our SMART funding is eliminated the CHA project is not likely to survive.

**2. What innovative contributions has your project made to the way in which health care is being provided in the Region?**

CHA is an outreach project that focuses on helping women protect themselves against disrespect and abuse within the health care system through our Patient’s Rights workshop. The Patient’s Rights workshop is a preventative tool to help women gain self-advocacy skills and make more informed choices about their own health care. Recently we began having participants evaluate their workshop experience. 86% have told us that they strongly agree or agree that they feel better prepared to ask their doctor a question about their health. As well, all of the 28 women who completed the evaluation stated that the CHA Information Kit would be useful when visiting their doctor. The Patient’s Rights workshop environment also helps women give voice to the barriers they face within the health care system. A common barrier raised by the women is the lack of language and cultural sensitivities of health care providers. The self-advocacy skills women learn enable them to educate health care providers around the barriers they face. In that way, the CHA project also supports women as a vital force in contributing to improvements to health care.

**3. In what ways do your project's activities keep people out of the formal health care system and save health care dollars?**

The CHA projects Patient's Rights workshop provides women with information that helps them to be self-directed in their health care choices. The CHA Information Kit also gives women 28 pages of health information including where to access clinics in their community and questions to ask their doctor to help determine what the best choices are for their health care. By giving women information about the range of options available to them in accessing health care, women will make more informed choices about where and how to access this care. Through information shared at workshops by community hosts and workshop participants we have found women unnecessarily use costly emergency room services as a first choice for minor ailments, as opposed to using a clinic or visiting a doctor. The Patient's Rights workshop encourages women to access appropriate health services.

**4. How have you utilized partnerships with other organizations or individuals to make your project more effective? How have your partners been affected by the partnership?**

The CHA project relies on community organizations serving as "community hosts" for our Patient's Rights workshop. Working with community organizations in this way has contributed significantly to the success of the CHA project. And has allowed us to reach a diversity of women. Since March 2000 CHA has worked with 16 community hosts providing twenty-three Patient's Rights workshops to 213 women from a range of communities. Some of the community hosts have included the following organizations: Multilingual Orientation Services Associations for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC); Pacific Immigration Resources Society; The Gathering Place Education Centre; Byng Satellite School; The Centre; the Strathcona Mental Health Team; Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services; and Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education (PACE).

Our affiliation with these community hosts has broadened the diversity of women who access the VWHC and utilize our services. It also gives the VWHC a broader understanding of available community services and where we may refer women. Having access to the programs available at community host organizations increases the effectiveness of the workshop learning experience and enables us to better promote CHA. For example, at a Patient's Rights workshop for Kurdish women, MOSAIC provided a translator to work with the facilitator to more effectively deliver the Patient's Rights workshop.

**5. How have you increased the capacity of the people you serve through your project, as well as those who are providing your services, to help themselves and their community?**

The Patient's Rights workshop provides women with skills to make decisions about their health care needs. Workshop participants learn about their right to access safe, respectful, and appropriate health care. The two-hour long workshop includes a range of information including: an introduction to the services provided at the VWHC; self-advocacy skill; things to

think about when choosing a doctor; informed consent; questions you commonly ask a doctor; routine exams; self-care; and resources and information sharing amongst workshop participants. The CHA Information Kit, available to workshop participants, is an excellent resource providing 28 pages of health information. We know anecdotally, that when women learn how to advocate for themselves these skills help them in all areas of their lives. The health information women receive at the Patient's Rights workshop is taken home, it is used to help educate other women, other family members, and shared within the broader community.

**6. What have you learned from implementing and evaluating your project that could improve or change health policy?**

We have learned that communicating in "clear language" is essential in helping women from a range of cultural backgrounds to take charge of their own health care. As well as providing health information in English that is in "clear language" form and design, it is important that basic health information be provided in other languages during the transition phase of learning English as a second language. The Patient's Rights workshop is fundamental in helping immigrant and refugee women participate in their own health care.