

Breaking Barriers: Helping Health Care Professionals Help Women

A Proposal for the Ministry of Health

The Project

Members of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective will educate health care professionals about women's needs and experiences of birth control and abortion services. The program will take place through a workshop and health care professionals will be given a resource manual listing service providers, support networks and pamphlets showing the array of services available to their female clients.

Goal

Our goal is to break the social stigma around sexuality, birth control and abortion, and to inform health care professionals about community resources available to their clients.

Aim

Our aim is to educate health care professionals through workshops and the provision of a resource manual about women's needs and experiences of birth control and abortion services. This work is directly in line with the goals of the Ministry of Health's New Directions campaign, as the educational program will focus on reproductive health promotion and prevention, helping women to develop personal health skills and creating supportive environments around health care for women.

The workshops will focus on the need for objectivity from service providers around birth control and unplanned pregnancy choices. It will outline common questions women have around these issues, what information women need, along with typical feelings women may experience both before and after an abortion.

We will prepare and provide health care professionals with a comprehensive resource manual that will touch on women's experiences, list birth control counseling and services, pregnancy counseling, and abortion counseling and services in their area. The manual will also contain a compilation of published pamphlets on sexuality, birth control, abortion and adoption.

Why a Project on Women's Reproductive Health

According to The Report of the British Columbia Task Force on Access to Contraception and Abortion Services, "sexuality, contraception and abortion have been segregated from other health care issues, surrounded by myths, taboos and misinformation. Consequently, many citizens have little or no knowledge about these subjects...In our regional consultations, it became clear that service providers are often unaware of the most current research findings, educational materials available or other services that exist within their communities. Often, there is a lack of factual, morally neutral sources of information. At the same time, much of the material that is produced remains undistributed, and there is considerable duplication of effort by small community agencies." (Realizing Choices, p.32)

The Task Force on Contraception and Abortion Services found that in a number of communities throughout the province, birth control, pregnancy and abortion counseling is not provided, except by a physician. The task force's research showed that both women and doctors were often unaware of the resources available in the community for counseling and services.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective believes the problem is not that the services and resources around women's reproductive health are not available, but that many health care professionals are unaware of the numerous resources in B.C. available to their clients.

Adding to the lack of information available from some health care professionals, many women are afraid to ask for information directly due to the stigma around reproductive issues. We believe health care professionals, as the front line workers who deal directly with female clients, need to help women break the silence around sexuality, birth control and abortion. We believe effective reproductive care includes both education and counseling to encourage women to make informed choices. It is when women do not receive the necessary information about their bodies that they are put at risk for unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

A Special Note About General Practitioners

We understand physicians are limited in their ability to provide comprehensive birth control and pregnancy counseling by restrictions in the fee schedule. However, we believe providing physicians with information through a workshop format and an informative manual will go a long way towards improving women's access to reproductive health information. The workshop and manual will describe women's needs and experiences with regard to these issues. It will outline community services and resources and provide physicians with pamphlets to pass on to clients. We believe this is a simple and effective way to make sure women are getting the information they need to make sound decisions.

Project Format

We believe it is important for service providers to have accurate, up-to-date information on all aspects of women's reproductive health. The workshops would pull together a broad array of current research findings on birth control, pregnancy counseling and abortion, incorporating women's feelings and experiences of each. The workshops would also incorporate a wealth of educational material already published by a variety of sources, from Planned Parenthood to community health organizations, the provincial government and women's health agencies. A copy of each guide would be given to each workshop participant along with a listing of where further copies of the documents could be ordered. The package would contain a resource list of services available in their community around birth control, pregnancy and abortion, incorporating information on counseling services, books to suggest to clients, where services can be obtained as well as support groups that exist in their communities.

Who Will Benefit

The workshops and resource manual will be directed at social workers, high school counselors, general practitioners, community health nurses and obstetricians/gynecologists. These health care providers will benefit by gaining insight into women's needs and experiences around reproductive health. Their female clients will also benefit by the additional information and knowledge they will receive from their service providers.

Where

The workshops and the distribution of manuals can take place at health care professional conferences and by organizing one-day programs for social workers, doctors, nurses and counselors in individual districts and communities.

Time frame

- Research and compilation of pamphlets for manual -
approximately 2 months
- Design and publication of manual - 2 months
- Organizing workshops - 1 month
- Workshop programs - 1 year or ongoing (depending on demand)

Cost

Manual and workshop research - \$6,000.00

Design and Publication costs for manual - \$5,000.00 for 1,000 manuals

Total Start-up costs \$11,000.00

Funding

Funding for the research and publication of the manual will be sought through the Ministry of Health. Funding for workshops will be sought through individual health care professional associations (e.g. College of Physicians and Surgeons, Vancouver Board of Health, etc.)

Resource Manual Outline and Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

* one page overview of history of birth control and abortion in B.C.,

Chapter One - Birth Control

Part A - Two page summary of common questions and answers and concerns women have around birth control

Part B - List of services/resources/pamphlets on birth control available in B.C.

Chapter Two - Unplanned Pregnancy

Part A - Two page summary of common reactions/questions women have regarding an unplanned pregnancy.

- Two page outline of the options available in a non-biased format.
- Two page outline of women's common reactions after an abortion and adoption

Part B - List of resources: Pregnancy counseling services in B.C.
Abortion service providers/counselors
Adoption service providers/counselors
Resources for expecting mothers

Chapter Three - Other resources

Part A - List of books/videos on birth control, sexuality, adoption and abortion to suggest to clients

Part B - List of support groups

Pamphlet Package

- A compilation of published pamphlets from B.C. service organizations and the federal government on birth control, pregnancy, abortion and adoption resources along with a list of where each pamphlet is published and where to order it.

Workshop Outline

Aim

To destigmatize reproductive health issues including sexuality, birth control, unplanned pregnancy and abortion and inform health care providers about the resources available to their female clients .

Introduction

- * A brief description of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective

Sexuality in our Culture

- * An overview of how media influences people's perceptions of sex, birth control, abortion and unplanned pregnancy,
- * The stigmatization of reproductive issues, effects of anti-choice propaganda on the mindset of the public, especially women and teenagers

Women's Needs and Experiences

- * Common queries, misinformation women have about birth control, unplanned pregnancies and abortion
- * need for unbiased information and counseling
- * common reactions when women do not receive information or counseling (unplanned pregnancies, STD's, repeat abortions)
- * common stages of reaction after an abortion
- * what women are looking for with regards to info., support from counselors, physicians, etc..(need for supportive atmosphere)

Providing Information/Counseling/Services and Resources

- * Discussion on resources available to health care professionals
- * Presentation of information manual and how to use it