



BC WOMEN'S HOSPITAL
& HEALTH CENTRE
*An agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority*



*Province-wide solutions.
Better health.*



BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides services for pregnant women, newborns and women with specialized health needs from across the province. BC Women's is an academic health centre affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the Women's Health Research Institute. For more information, please visit www.bcwomens.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information, please visit www.phsa.ca.

Media Contact:

Public Affairs & Communications
BC Women's Hospital
& Health Centre
604-875-2301
pafc@cw.bc.ca

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

ACCESS for women with disabilities April 2, 2007

Vancouver, B.C. – For decades, health care professionals have been telling women about the importance of regular cervical cancer screening (Pap tests). In B.C., incidence rates from cervical cancer have been reduced by over 70 per cent.

The challenge, as research on gynecologic health suggests, is that women with disabilities are equally at risk for cervical cancer as women without disabilities, but they do not have the same level of access to care as non-disabled women. In addition to barriers like time constraints, costs, child care, language and cultural differences, women with disabilities also face the lack of accessible examination tables in physicians' offices and trying to find a setting that feels safe. So, where can they go?

The ACCESS clinic at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, in Vancouver offers cervical and breast cancer screening to women with disabilities who are not able to have the exams done in their doctor's office. The clinic offers women with disabilities of varying types and severity the opportunity to access a well-designed, well-equipped, safe environment in which to obtain gynecological health care, sometimes for the first time in their lives. New patients can self-refer or be referred to the clinic by their physicians or health care providers.

"We put a great deal of thought into the development and design of the ACCESS clinic to make the experience for women with disabilities as comfortable as possible," says Laurie Hill, advisor for the clinic. "The staff are knowledgeable about disability issues, the examining room is equipped with an adjustable examining table, including lift supports, and women have the option to arrange for their own health care provider to perform the screening at the clinic."

Hill has a unique perspective on the clinic, because she is also a patient. "My experience as a patient has been very positive," says Hill, who had never received any gynecological health care until she was in her mid-forties. "The examining room can accommodate my electric wheelchair, and the staff are sensitive to my needs. My care at ACCESS has always been provided with respect and dignity."

-more-

Lenore Riddell, Nurse Practitioner at ACCESS and Senior Practice Leader at BC Women's, points out that gynecologic health concerns for women with disabilities tend to take a back seat to health issues they face related to their disabilities. "This area of health and wellness is so often neglected because the focus is on other aspects of a woman's disability," she says. "But not having regular cancer screening puts disabled woman at a greater risk for late diagnosis of cervical and breast cancer, and a poor prognosis."

Since the clinic's opening, both Riddell and Hill have worked to bring awareness to the professional community about its existence, but they emphasize the need for greater awareness—about the importance of regular cervical and breast cancer screening, about the clinic's existence for health care providers at all levels, and awareness within the disabled community, their families and caregivers. Hill hopes to see both the medical profession and women with disabilities better utilize the ACCESS clinic. "We have the ACCESS clinic in place now," says Hill. "If its purpose to enhance the health of women with disabilities is going to be realized, we need to use it."

The ACCESS clinic's services include Pap tests, screening for sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptive advice, pelvic exams, breast exams, referral to mammography, and referral to a gynecologist as needed. To make an appointment or for more information, call 604-875-3060 and ask for the ACCESS clinic. A doctor's referral is not necessary.

-30-

Please note:

- Laurie Hill is available for interviews.
- Lenore Riddell is available for interviews.
- Gynecologic health research findings adapted from *We're Women, Too: Identifying Barriers to Gynecologic and Breast Health Care for Women with Disabilities*. British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health. Vancouver, B.C. The full research study is available at www.bccewh.bc.ca.
- Cervical cancer incidence rates are taken from the BC Cancer Agency website (www.bccancer.bc.ca).

Media Contact:

Public Affairs & Communications
BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre
604-875-2301
pafc@cw.bc.ca