



VCCW Issues

WOMEN'S HEALTH: "WHAT DO YOU KNOW?"

When Margaret Sanger wrote "What Every Girl Should Know" in 1913, it was only the beginning of her fight to legalize contraception. Contraception was not legalized in the United States until 1937 but Margaret Sanger had known for a long time the importance of educating women about their own bodies and the health issues that affected them.

Today, some of the issues may be different, but it is still vital for women to have information about their own bodies and health in order to take care of themselves.

Hospitals and clinics in Ventura County offer a variety of services and educational programs directed specifically toward women's health.

In this issue of our newsletter is some general information on services and education provided by some of the hospitals and clinics in Ventura County. There is also the first of a two-part article on PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome) written by guest columnist, Mary J. Jones, Nurse Practitioner, founder of the Channel Islands Center for Women's Health in Ventura.

Pleasant Valley Hospital in Camarillo and Community Memorial Hospital in Ventura have developed Women's Centers to centralize special services for women. Both hospitals offer osteoporosis screening.

Programs such as prepared childbirth, community education and mammography screening are offered at St. John's Regional Medical Center, Oxnard, Pleasant Valley Hospital, Camarillo, Los Robles Hospital, Thousand Oaks, Westlake Community Hospital, Westlake Village, and Community Memorial Hospital in Ventura.

Community education programs offered by these hospitals include exercise classes, family workshops, lectures and seminars on topics covering premenstrual syndrome (PMS), breast cancer, childbirth, stress, diet and nutrition. At Community Memorial Hospital in Ventura, the Silver Service program, geared for seniors, offers training in dealing with medicare procedures.

The Ventura County Medical Center in Ventura has a women's center and offers a gynecological clinic as well as complete prenatal care and a comprehensive family planning clinic. Although the majority of its patients are on Medi-Cal, according to Maureen Conroy, R.N., Clinic Manager, not all of its clients fall into this group.

Of special interest is a Teen Clinic, which is the only one in Ventura County. In operation since October, 1985, it treats pregnant teenagers up to age 17. The program stresses education, infant safety and community resources available after the baby is born. The Women's Center and Teen Clinic are located at 3291 Loma Vista Rd., Ventura. Phone 652-6121.

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PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME

--- Guest column by Mary J. Jones, Nurse Practitioner, Channel Islands Center for Women's Health.

Premenstrual Syndrome is alive and well in Ventura County! You may be wondering how a condition with so many negative connotations can be described in such a positive fashion.... well, you have to look how far we have come in a short time.

It wasn't very long ago that both men and women denied ever having heard of such a thing. Rumors were rampant; was it contagious, inherited or just the luck of the draw that a woman developed "it." Today we can discuss how to prevent PMS, how to treat it and more importantly how to understand it. Let's begin at the beginning with the basics.

Premenstrual Syndrome is defined as a clustering of symptoms that occur in a women's menstrual cycle anywhere from the time of ovulation up to and including the first few days of her menstruation. After the completion of her menses there should be a sequence of days which would be described as good or normal. The symptoms can be primarily physical such as headaches, breast tenderness, weight gain or bloating. The symptoms can be primarily emotional such as: mood swings, food cravings, or in severe cases suicidal tendencies.

In most instances the symptoms are a combination. The length of time that a woman experiences PMS can also vary. In mild cases she may experience symptoms for only a few days just prior to the onset of menstruation while in the severe case they may last the entire two weeks plus part of the menstruating time.

There is still quite a bit of controversy between many of the researchers on what exactly should constitute PMS or more often what PMS isn't. Because of this there can be quite a bit of confusion for the woman who is trying to decide where to seek help.

The best tool a woman can use is to start a journal or calendar of her cycles. It is imperative that the calendar be kept for at least three months in order to discern any patterns. The most common patterns that I have had experience with have been: every other month is more difficult, every third month is worse or all the months seem to be in the same mode.

When you are keeping your calendar try to write down everything that you do, feel or experience that you would not consider normal for you. **DO NOT** interpret your calendar as you go along, wait until you are on your next menses before rereading it. Many times women just focus on the emotional symptoms because they are the most incapacitating, but don't forget the physical ones. They are very helpful when choosing your wellness plan.

A final note on keeping your calendar - always disregard the month of December from your decision making process - there is just too much going on to allow for any objectivity.

So, now that we have a basic definition - who gets PMS and who doesn't? Aside from the fact that men don't experience PMS how do you predict whether a woman will? Well, we don't know the answer to that. We do

know that 90% of women at so time in their menstruating lives will have PMS to some degree. We do know that some factors increase a woman's opportunity to develop PMS. Let's look at some of these factors.

First there is the adolescent. Frequently from the very beginning her menstrual cycles were irregular. You may also see a teenager develop menstrual irregularities due to anorexia, bulimia or excessive exercise. The teenager may be using birth control pills to either regulate her cycles or as her method of birth control. Because the birth control pill blocks the body's normal cycle it can be a trigger over time of PMS symptoms

Second is the woman who is in the process of having her family. Most women do not experience PMS after the first pregnancy but rather increase their odds with each succeeding pregnancy.

Third on the list of factors is the tubal ligation. This means of sterilization is thought to intensify or trigger PMS because of the way it interrupts the path of the egg. There is no way to accomplish studies to verify whether this is a factor so this tends to be viewed rather skeptically. I have seen a group of women, however, who could clearly state tubal ligation is responsible.

The final factor is the hysterectomy patient, particularly the woman who had a partial hysterectomy which means her ovaries have

been left in. The PMS symptoms do not occur immediately. There seems to be a lag time of anywhere from three to six months before the woman begins to feel like she is still cycling. In some instances a woman who has had her ovaries removed may also complain of PMS symptoms particularly if she is using estrogen supplementation.

Now that we have reviewed the most frequent causes of PMS let's look at outside influences which also effect the occurrence of PMS or play a part in intensifying the symptoms..

The primary outside influence, of course, is stress. None of us is stress-free and indeed a certain amount of stress is positive and enables us to live a full life; however, some stresses are negative.

Some examples of these stresses would include: marital problems, problems with the children, financial difficulties, illness or a death in the family. Some of these stress issues we may not be able to do anything about right now and some we can.

A secondary influence is how we normally take care of ourselves. What is our daily routine like? Do we eat adequately? Do we exercise and take time for relaxation? If we are honest with ourselves the answers to most of these questions is probably no. All of these are factors which will effect the level of wellness that you can achieve.

I mentioned in the beginning of this article about PMS prevention. This is indeed

possible if we start by educating our teenagers. It is important that the teenager understand that she does have the ability to participate in her own level of wellness. She has the ability to control some of the key factors which can effect PMS. The adolescent is able to plan her nutritional program, exercise program and avoid becoming anorexic or bulimic. She can participate in the decision about using birth control pills and she can be educated as to the possible side effects so that she can make other choices if the symptoms occur. A woman who is planning another pregnancy can become informed about PMS prior to becoming pregnant or while she is pregnant so that she can plan what might happen in the post-partum time. She can incorporate her partner into the planning of this critical time. The best prevention is education

If you realize that you have PMS you can begin to get well immediately. The process is a lifestyle change for many women. I will review the various steps that are on the path to achieving wellness.

First, look at your lifestyle and the level of stress that is built into it at this time. What can be altered? Can you find someone to help you or is some of it not that important anyway? Look at the issues that you have no control over and come to a level of acceptance about that. Once you have made peace with yourself then you can tackle the rest.

Second, nutrition has been the one aspect that all researchers agree on. It is imperative

that you eat three meals or five small meals a day so that you can keep your blood sugar level regulated. It is important that you eliminate as much as possible those foods which will intensify your symptoms. These foods include; sugar, caffeine products, red meat and alcohol. Don't try to eliminate everything at once. You may experience withdrawal and then you will begin to view the whole process as a punishment.

The third area has to do with exercise - this is the other area that all researchers agree on. It is important to exercise three times a week for about thirty minutes a day. Try to exercise every other day. Once again if you don't like to exercise start to do it one day a week and slowly build up. This is important for our menopausal years as well. At this time, the type of exercise is not important but rather the consistency.

As you proceed down your path to wellness there are additional steps that you might choose to augment your progress. These additional steps are viewed with some skepticism by various researchers. Let's explore these options.

The first option is in the area of vitamin formula for PMS. There are many on the market today and they are all basically the same with a few variations to make each one different so they all have different names. The purpose of the vitamins is to help with some of the basic symptoms such as bloating, breast tenderness, fatigue and mild mood swings.

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Some of the formulas also contain herbal remedies which may also benefit some of the women with PMS. If a woman does not respond to these then she may choose to pursue treatment within the realm of traditional medicine. This may be either with supplementation with the hormone progesterone or perhaps the addition of a diuretic.

Sometimes a tranquilizer or anti-depressant is recommended in a complicated case of PMS. What is important is that each woman is participating in her wellness plan. We don't have all the answers about PMS but at least we have some partial solutions. Whatever you do, communicate with your significant others about your PMS. Help educate them so that they may better help you as you get well. It is a great deal of work to achieve wellness and even more to maintain wellness.

Remember as you become discouraged along the way that you did not develop PMS overnight. Many of the factors that we discussed in this article probably have happened to you. Don't give up! Keep in mind that your wellness is your gift to you. Remember, once your PMS has vanished it doesn't have to return - but if it does you will know how to recognize and treat it so that PMS will never frighten or control you again.



Mary Jones

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis affects 25 percent of postmenopausal women. It is a severe progressive loss of bone tissue, and women in all age groups risk developing it. Women seem to be affected more than men because their bones are less dense. Osteoporosis leads to a condition commonly known as "brittle bones" placing women who have it at greater risk of serious injury and broken bones as a result of a fall. Currently there is no way to restore bone mass to normal once it has been lost, making early diagnosis and prevention extremely important.

Women who smoke, have a high alcohol and/or caffeine intake, lead sedentary lifestyles, or who do not get enough calcium in their diets increase the risk of developing osteoporosis.

There are sophisticated x-ray techniques to help diagnose the disorder earlier, but as of yet, they are only available at major health centers and may or may not be covered by health insurance plans. More research is needed for accurate and early diagnosis and treatment.

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Planned Parenthood in Ventura offers community education services, a resource center, pregnancy counseling and a family planning/birth control clinic. Phone 643-2159.

What is Mammography?

An x-ray examination of the breast, mammography is used to screen women with no breast cancer symptoms (screening mammography) and help evaluate lumps and abnormalities (diagnostic mammogram). Most facilities offer low dose x-rays which give you no more radiation exposure than you would get from a routine chest x-ray. A mammogram can detect small tumors up to two years before they can be felt and treatment at this early stage provides a cure rate that is in excess of 90 percent.

"Don't give Breast Cancer a Place to Hide"

is the theme of the American Cancer Society's 1987 Cancer Awareness Week, April 6 - 12, 1987. As part of this drive, women in Ventura County are encouraged to participate in a low cost (\$50) mammography screening program by calling 983-3787 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. starting the week of April 6 - 10 and continuing through the week of April 13 - 17. American Cancer Society volunteers will screen and refer eligible women to a health care facility in Ventura County. The requirements for women to participate are: must be 35 years of age or older, must have never had a mammogram, do not have any symptoms of breast disease, have not had a lumpectomy or any other form of breast surgery.

"SALUTE TO WOMEN"

Honoring women throughout Ventura County has been a very special project of the Commission for Women. For the sixth year the Commission will present "Salute To Women" awards to recognize the contributions of outstanding women. The annual "Salute To Women" banquet will take place this year on Thursday, October 29, at the Westlake Plaza Hotel.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Commission, Inc., the banquet is also the annual event to raise funds to support Commission for Women projects.

In the past, funds have been used to assist with the County-wide needs assessment project and to provide software and printer upgrades for the Commission's computer.

Categories for the 1987 awards are: The Arts, Business, Community Service, Education, Law, Media, Science/Health, Young Women (age 18-25).

Nomination forms are now available through the Commission for Women office, public libraries and various women's organizations throughout the county. To obtain the form, or if you have any questions, call the Commission office at 652-7611.

The Commission for Women meets regularly on the third Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. - 12 noon at the Senior Nutrition Program Center, 2220 Ventura Blvd., in Camarillo. Comments or questions may be directed to the Commission either at the public meetings or through the Commission office.

"FARM FAMILIES: WOMEN'S STRENGTH"

On Saturday, May 16, 1987, the Ventura County Commission for Women and other organizations will present the second annual forum on Women in Agriculture: "A Dialogue Among Women in All Aspects of Agriculture," at All Saints Episcopal Church, 144 South C street, Oxnard, from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Child care will be provided to encourage maximum attendance by the families for whom the conference has been planned. This will be a bilingual conference in English and Spanish. There is no charge to conference attendees.

The panel discussion will focus on "Farm Families: Women's Strengths." Four workshops will focus on Immigration Issues, Upgrading Skills in Agriculture, Childraising Issues, and Health and Safety Issues. The emphasis will be on discussion among participants.

The conference will end with a supper. The Women in Agriculture Forum Committee is seeking sponsors to assist with the conference and help cover costs. Sponsorship could include donations of food, beverages, paper goods, money, volunteers (to organize and serve supper) or child care services. If you have any questions, please call Alina Lopez at (805) 640-0846.

The Friends of the Commission will meet on Thursday, April 23, 7:30 p.m. at the Senior Nutrition center located at 2220 Ventura Blvd., Camarillo. This will be a general meeting for all Friends members and prospective members.

Call Lee Anderson, (818) 704-0828 or (805) 496-8470 for further information.

FINANCIAL AID FOR STUDENTS

The California Student Aid Commission administers the State's major financial assistance programs helping students to attend colleges and postsecondary schools.

These programs include Cal Grants, State Graduate Fellowships, California Guaranteed Student Loans, California Loans to Assist Students, Work-Study and other special programs.

To help inform students about the availability of this aid, the California Student Aid Commission distributes the "Financial Aid for Students" workbook, pamphlets, and conducts workshops that are primarily directed at high school and college campuses.

For answers to questions about student financial aid, or to request a student handbook, an application for grants or for an application and information about student loans, write to:

California Student Aid
Commission
Public Information
Office

1410 Fifth Street
P.O. Box 942845
Sacramento, CA

94245-0001

or call: (916) 322-6280.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

A dedicated group of art lovers, artists, and civic leaders has joined together to form the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

For membership information write to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, P.O. Box 37603, Washington, D.C. 20013.

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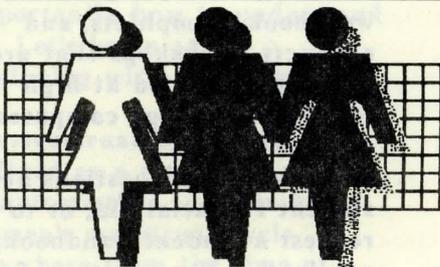
The Ventura County Commission for Women wishes to express sincere thanks to two special organizations which provide ongoing moral support for the work of the commission and recently have provided much-appreciated financial support as well. To Friends of the Commission, for their recent purchase of software and font cartridges for our computer system, a contribution of over \$800, and to Soroptimist International of the Conejo for their \$100 contribution and kind words of encouragement and support, we say a heartfelt "thank you!"

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Commission for Women**

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