

"WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUES"

by

DR. VALERIE TAYLOR

Chief Psychiatrist, Women's College Hospital

Toronto & Area Council of Women

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Report by Thelma McGillivray, Past President PCWO
& NCWC, VP, Social Development

The following is a brief report on my attendance at the Toronto Council of Women's meeting to hear their speaker, Dr. Valerie Taylor on the topic of "Women's Health Issues". We were welcomed by Council's new president, Connie Zboch.

Dr. Valerie Taylor was previously employed by St. Joseph's Hospital in Hamilton where she was in charge of Geriatric medicine. She is the author of "The Cognitive Work Book for Weight Management". For the past five months, Dr. Taylor has been employed at the Women's College Hospital as their Chief of Psychiatry. Her goal is to increase the profile of both women receiving mental health treatment and those women who are their care givers. She stated that 25% suffer from depression. Women, generally speaking, are more likely to go to hospital rather than attend the services of the Canadian Addictions/Mental Health (CAMH) where they clearly do not want to go. Dr. Taylor said, mainly men attend the CAMH and perhaps the women feel that Women's College Hospital is a warmer and safer place for them but unfortunately they attend in a very troubled condition. It is urgent that the sooner women get attention the better, as a lot can be done if treatment is started early. WCH reach-out to high-risk marginalized women as well as by offering treatment via the internet and by tele communication through television especially to those isolated in rural northern Ontario.

WCH's programmes are:

- (1) Trauma patients; abused as a child and/or as an adult, and immigrants who suffer from 'war trauma'.
- (2) Reproductive Life Stages; transitions through two areas of unique concern; pregnancy and menopause
- (3) Mental Health and Medical Programmes; cardio/diabetes patients are more likely to present with mental illness because heart attack patients often experience depression after their treatment.

Dr. Taylor emphasized the huge discrepancy between men and women who seek and receive treatment and surgery. She highlighted this as a main concern because men are offered timely surgery while women are not. This also pertains to hip/knee, and neurological resources. She stated the

differences are frightening and said she is not sure what the reasons are. (the audience later, mainly women cited many reasons, such as being told they are getting older and must expect physical degeneration pains; women tend to tolerate high levels of pain and discomfort which can become fatal; they feel they must put their families, jobs, etc. ahead of themselves.) However these reasons are too much like blaming the victim instead of possibly the poor training or ageism/sexism demonstrated by some doctors.

Thus the high need to educate others and identify the reasons for this. Dr. Taylor said that while mental illness medications are complicated, there can be some negative drug interaction for women who take estrogen and other hormone therapy. As well women who undergo breast cancer surgery and experience body changes through mastectomies can be devastating for their body image. Given that women are "not allowed to complain" they need to be reassured that it is okay (normal) to be upset after this surgery and there are resources out there.

The Psychiatric Programme is a catch-all for conditions; depression, anxiety affecting women and men and their families. 23% of patients are men. The Reproductive Programme includes post-partum depression. They can help a mom who is unwell and dad too. This includes a Menopause/Prostate Clinic, and physical assessments as well. Both get looked after.

The Women's College Hospital is in the middle of building a new hospital on Grenville Street, Toronto, which will be operating in 2013 and totally completed by 2015. There will be Child Care there as well as it is "a welcome place and women need to feel safe". (Referrals are required from a family doctor or a Walk-In Clinic physician. This raised questions and members and guests were told because the system works that way.)

Women's College Hospital was the first hospital to introduce the "sexual assault programme" and they are on call to go to St. Michael's Hospital to serve any women there. Dr. Taylor gave credit to their many volunteers, stating that they could not function without them. Many volunteers have been previous patients and just "want to give back". There are no in-patient beds at WCH (they go to Sunnybrook Hospital now) as "the goal is to keep you out of hospital through physical examinations and preventative medical and mental health practice."

When past-president Mary Lemyre inquired how Local Councils can assist WCH's work, Dr. Taylor replied the two most important areas are "fundraising and advocacy". (While they receive a lot of donations for the building of the hospital they receive little for their clinical work.) Dr. Taylor distributed a package of material describing WCH and more is available upon request.