

HEALTH INFORMATION:

What do women want? Whom do they trust?

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Do your patients know basic facts about their bodies and their health? Do they ask questions? Do you give them health information or explain things to them, in terms they understand? When you are a patient, does your doctor give you information you want? If you answered "no" to these questions, you are not alone.

Doctors and other health care providers, in interviews with Women's Health Virginia (WHV) representatives, indicated that many women are unaware of significant and fundamental medical information. Patients often believe many health "myths" and unsubstantiated claims for health care products. Health educators also reported that programs often attract the well-informed patients who have questions and not women who lack basic health knowledge.

Women's Health Virginia developed its *Improving Health Information* research to understand how accurate information might be conveyed more effectively to Virginia women. Our preliminary search for studies that had relevant data turned up surprisingly little. Most reported studies focused on specific population subgroups (women of a specific age, race, or limited geographic location and/or with particular diseases) and we found none regarding women in Virginia. We were aware that available data on Virginia women was limited and this search confirmed that WHV's research would be groundbreaking and important for all concerned about improving women's wellness.

WHV collected data through a telephone survey and in focus and discussion groups with women around the state. The survey, conducted by Southeastern Research Institute of Richmond, obtained responses from 1,520 women (female heads of households) throughout the Commonwealth regarding their health concerns and their use of, satisfaction with, and preferences for health information. The focus and discussion groups sought additional information on these issues and explored in greater depth the survey responses.

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information – and more understandable information – than they get.

When asked about how they want to learn about a health topic, physicians (primary care and specialist in the field) were the most favored source, with 93 per cent of respondents indicating those choices. Although only a slightly smaller number selected "by reading about it" (91%) or "summary in plain English" (90%), doctors were selected far more often than

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nurses (78%) and classes or seminars (50%).

Doctors' offices are also the most trusted sources of information, with 98% of women noting that they are very likely (79%) or somewhat likely (19%) to trust information they receive there. It was notable, however, the high level of trust that women have for non-medical or non-media



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sources, including family and friends (78% total, with 21% very likely and 57% somewhat likely) and clergy members (56% total, with 18% very likely and 38% somewhat likely).

Women seek help from physicians with medical and health questions (71%), but many also rely on family members and friends to a considerable degree (19%). Women also turn to their physicians and other health care providers to ask about new health and wellness information of interest (90%), but nearly half of the surveyed women do not put new information to use.

WHV sought to understand more about women's information seeking behavior in focus discussion groups. In

light of the preference for and trust in physicians, we wanted to verify that women were distinguishing physicians from other health care providers. We also wanted to learn whether women were getting information they wanted or needed.

The discussions revealed the special role of physicians, particularly when there is a long-standing relationship. But often women noted that they only received information when they asked questions and a number commented that they did not ask questions of their physicians because they felt the doctors did not have time to talk with them.

Others were afraid that their questions would seem stupid. Some

remarked that when they asked questions, they did not understand the information they were given. They also did not want to ask for explanations, out of concern, again, that they would seem unintelligent or that the doctor did not have time to explain any more.

The implications of this research are clear. Improving women's health information means having physicians more actively involved with providing and explaining the information. Women are seeking information, from a variety of sources, but they trust and rely on doctors and they want their doctors to give them information in clear, understandable terms. □

Women's Health Virginia is a non-profit organization, headquartered in Charlottesville dedicated to promoting and improving the health and well-being of Virginia women and girls. To learn more about our programs and the survey, go to www.womenshealthvirginia.org, email us at mail@womenshealthvirginia.org or call 434-220-4500. Additional survey data (including data regarding particular demographic or geographic populations), can be provided.

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We all took notes frantically as Joan Roediger, JD,

LLM spoke on practice management, HR issues, co-ownership arrangements and mergers. Her father is a physician and her specialties were chosen because helping physicians practice safely is her goal. She practices in Philadelphia, PA with the firm of Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell & Hippel, LLP and specifically works in their Business and Finance Department and Health Care Practice Group. She spoke to physicians on Saturday during the luncheon hosted by the Women Physicians' Section at the MSV Annual Meeting in October in Norfolk.

Her program, "Avoiding the Courtroom While Managing Your Practice," was well received as she discussed many important topics ranging from the growth of litigation, basics-in-hiring, staff promotion and

Roediger Offers Tips on

KEEPING YOU out of the COURTROOM

and procedures in place to minimize legal exposure. An effective employee evaluation process can protect you and your practice. Keeping up with this process will provide you with information you need to: determine how well your employees are performing, make annual raises based on merit, reward good performance and encourage improvement among others. She also advised that revising your job descriptions and shuffling personnel may be essential if your practice has experienced changes.

The increasing reliance on computers and the internet have opened a whole new array of employment-related liability claims, explained Roediger, who suggested a

personnel file development. She warned that an increasing number of physician practices are finding they are, unintentionally, getting caught up in employment related litigation; she stressed the need to have policies

Women's Conference A Smashing Success!

Nearly 70 female physicians turned out for this year's annual Women Physicians' Conference "Managing It All and Taking the Lead" which was held on Friday, September 26 in Richmond.

The speakers included CPA Steve Piascik, leadership expert Jan Allen, Del. Viola Baskerville, and the Medical Society's physician practice advocate Rose Moore. They shared a variety of topics with attendees, including personal and professional finances, managing employees and working with other women, the medical claims process, and the important role women can play in the political process.

Pamela S. Chavis, MD, who chairs the MSV's Women Physicians' Section, thanks all of the women who attended the conference and hopes those of you who did not will take the opportunity to participate in next year's event. A feature of next year's conference will be a 360 Leadership evaluation. It will be limited to the first 100 registrants and require pre-registration but will give concrete insight into individual leadership styles. □



Joan Roediger, JD, LLM poses with Pamela S. Chavis, MD, who chairs the MSV's Women Physicians' Section, at the Women Physicians' Section luncheon during the MSV Annual Meeting.

policy manual should contain an internet usage policy to affirm that internet use is restricted to practice business. She shared other useful information with the group and then answered individual questions at the end of her presentation. Her bound handout was a wonderful take-home document. □



Dianne Reynolds-Cane, MD, found time to chat with outgoing president Hazle Konerding, MD during the MSV Foundation Gala at this year's Annual Meeting

Accolades

Accolades

Dr. Reynolds-Cane Now Board of Medicine President

Congratulations to Dianne Reynolds-Cane, MD! She is serving as President of the Virginia Board of Medicine. Dr. Reynolds-Cane was elected by fellow board members during the October board meeting; she had been appointed to the Board in 1999 by Governor Jim Gilmore. Dr. Reynolds-Cane is the first black American to rise to the position of Board President. The Virginia Board regulates the practice of medicine, osteopathy, podiatry, and chiropractic, as well as the licensees of its advisory boards. She also was appointed by Governor Mark Warner to the Board of Health Professions in 2002. The Board of Health Professions oversees 13 health-related boards in the Commonwealth, including the Virginia Board of Medicine.

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Dr. Dalton Wins MSV Community Service Award

Kudos to Claudette Dalton, MD! She was the recipient of the 2003 Community Service Award for her commitment to the rural underserved populations in Virginia and for her service as chair of University of Virginia's annual community service outreach project in southwest Virginia. Through this program more than 500 people receive free medical care.

Accolades

TEMPERED RADICALISM:

12th Annual Women in Medicine & Science Pathways to Leadership Conference

The Medical Society of Virginia's Women Physicians' Section will once again collaborate with the Women in Medicine and Science conference. Presented by the four Virginia schools of medicine, the 2004 conference will be held on Friday, March 5, 2004 at The Richmond Marriott.

Educational sessions include:

- Keynote Address by Debra Meyerson, PhD
Leading Change Through Tempered Radicalism
- Keynote Panel - Acquiring Power and Using It Well
- Advocacy: Turning Your Caring Into Your Cause
- Daycare Delimma: What Makes Your Kids Sick?
- Negotiation Skills: Be Careful What You Ask For
- Express Yourself Publicly
- Practice Management Basics: "How to Succeed in Business"

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- Wife, Mother, Doctor, Daughter: The Evolving Lifestyle
- Marketing Your Practice: Why You Are Special

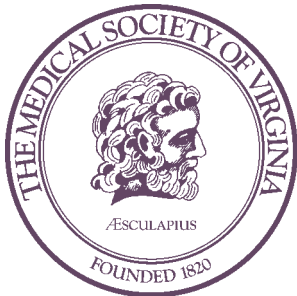
Mark your calendar now to attend! Contact the VCU OCME for additional information at (804) 828-3640.

SAVE THE DATE!

Save September 24, 2004 on your calendar for the Women Physicians' Conference, which will focus on communications. The MSV will provide you with a unique opportunity to work with a local provider of 360-degree feedback who specializes in feedback systems for physicians.

The MSV is developing a customized survey for you and those who work with you. The survey evaluates performance in several areas that impact the overall effectiveness of your practice. You will receive a confidential report highlighting key strengths and some areas for development. You can utilize this information to develop a specific plan of action to implement that can increase both professional success and the quality of the workplace for you and those with whom you work.

(Note: advance pre-registration will be required with limited enrollment - there will be a nominal fee for those who participate in this personal evaluation process.)



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The MSV Women Physicians' Section thanks the **MSV Insurance Center** for their sponsorship. For more information about how the MSVIC can help with your health and malpractice insurance needs, call toll free **877-226-9357**.