

# Health care principles aired by Women's Centre

May 8/75

By MIKE BERNARD

Prevention and self-responsibility in health care are key principles behind five proposals the Nelson Women's Centre delivered to the recent Selkirk workshop on health care delivery and social service needs.

The proposals, which deal with health needs of both men and women, range from an education and information program for the use of contraceptives, to a supportive counselling service for outpatients at Kootenay Lake District Hospital (KLDH).

The first recommendation calls for free contraceptives for those needing them combined with the lowering of the age of consent under the B.C. Infants Act.

In a recent interview, Cally Wozny, a Women's Centre coordinator, said the Centre based its proposal for lowering the age of consent from the present 19 on a 1973 recommendation put forward by the Foulkes report on health delivery in B.C.

Though the report doesn't specify an alternate age, Ms. Wozny said she feels the age should be lowered to take into consideration when people start having sexual relations.

Both Ms. Wozny and Diane Luthmers, another Centre coordinator, said the first proposal should be instituted with an information and education program about the use of contraceptives.

The second proposal suggests the institution of an education program emphasizing the need for self-responsibility in health care. Such a program would deal with contraceptive use, venereal disease, sexuality, common health problems, and surgical procedures used in hospitals.

The program would be part of a shift from "crisis care" in health delivery to preventive care. The need for preventive care is demonstrated by figures on abortion from KLDH, which show the abortion rate for women under-18 in Nelson has doubled since 1973, Ms. Wozny said.

Harry Procter, KLDH administrator, confirmed the figures, but added the records only date back to 1973 when the Criminal Code was amended to allow for some abortions. There are no records showing the number of abortions performed before 1973.

Ms. Wozny said particular attention should be paid to high school students. After a recent visit to the Nelson Youth Centre for discussions about sexuality, the students told the centre representatives they had earned more in a few hours than they had in three years of school.

### THIRD PROPOSAL

The third proposal calls for diagnostic tests for venereal disease on a routine basis. Ms. Wozny said 80 per cent of women who contract gonorrhoea do not have symptoms of the disease initially. Some of these women don't discover they have it until it's too late—the disease has spread to the cervix rendering them sterile, she said.

Ms. Luthmers said the Selkirk Health Unit now offers the diagnostic service but the hours are not convenient for most people.

A spokeswoman for the Health Unit said the Well Women's Clinic is open for routine testing Wednesdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The centre is open during regular weekly hours for treatment of men and women with symptoms of venereal disease. She said the clinic is planning to institute more convenient hours this summer or routine testing but she

declined to give details.

With early detection, gonorrhoea and syphilis are completely curable, Ms. Wozny said.

Prevention of disease through early detection also is the rationale of the Centre's fourth proposal—a universal screening process for breast cancer in Nelson.

Ms. Wozny said one of 15 women in Canada now have or will develop breast cancer sometime in their lives. Of these, one of 30 will die. She suggested routine checks for breast cancer could reduce the mortality rate.

KLDH presently conducts breast cancer tests on a referral basis, but women must have symptoms before being referred for examination.

What is needed is a routine test to which women have universal access, she said.

Mr. Procter said KLDH expects delivery of its new diagnostic equipment by August. Following its delivery, the hospital will set aside one day a week for routine screening requests from women.

He said the hospital receives about three or four requests a week for routine tests.

The fifth proposal recommends the institution of a supportive follow-up service for outpatients at KLDH, particularly for women who have just had abortions.

Women should be given information about birth control and birth control devices following their release from hospital, Ms. Wozny said. They also should be reminded to return for routine checks following an abortion, she said.

The Women's Centre is planning to discuss their proposals with an official from the Social Planning and Review Council of B.C., sometime this week, Ms. Wozny said.