

## Women's health movement grows ever stronger

Health/Barbara Varro

The women's health movement has slowly but steadily been gaining momentum during the last dozen years.

What began with assertive women questioning the medical establishment and demanding more participation in their own health care has become a viable movement. Increasing numbers of women today are asking questions about the harmful effects of certain drugs and hormone treatments. And the National Women's Health Network (NWHN), a consumer advocacy group formed in 1975 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., is pressing for recognition of women's health concerns.

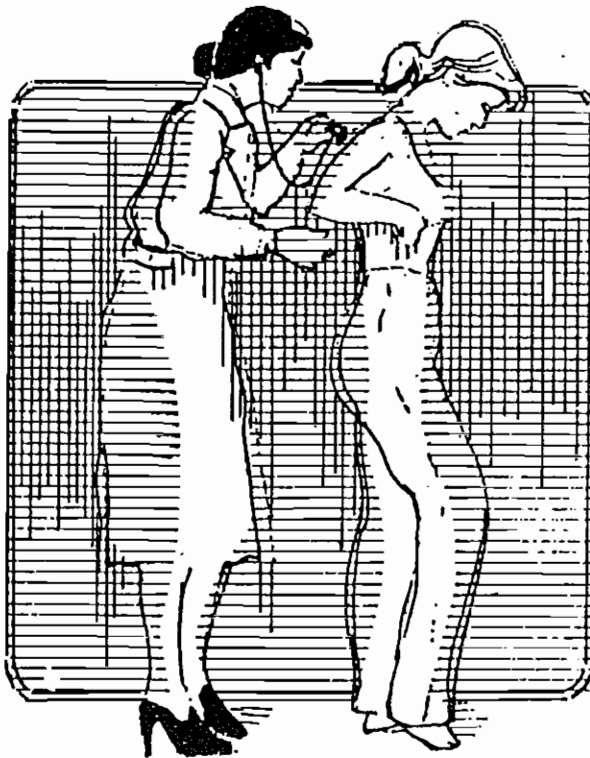
Health centers catering exclusively to women have sprung up in many cities across the country since the late 1960s. From perhaps a handful in 1969, the number of centers has grown to nearly 500 throughout the country, according to the NWHN. A spokeswoman for the group credits the Boston Health Collective's book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (published 11 years ago), for spurring interest in women's health concerns.

The population of female medical school students has burgeoned in the last decade. In 1980, according to the American Medical Association, females comprised 27.8 of the first-year students in the country's medical schools, compared with 9.1 per cent in 1970. Many of those women will go on to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology.

NEARLY 9 PERCENT of the 22,000 board-certified obstetrician-gynecologists are women, reports the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. But that number will soon increase significantly because 28 percent of the residents in obstetrics-gynecology in 1980 were female (almost twice as many as the 14.6 percent in 1975).

Many pregnant women feel that female doctors, or nurse-midwives, are more empathetic during the birth experience than males. Dr. Nada Jazbec, obstetrician-gynecologist at Columbus Hospital (which, by the way, has 12 females in its obstetrics and gynecology section) believes that many women just feel they have more rapport with a woman doctor.

"Patients tell me they can relate to a female doctor better than they can to a male," she said. "They say they feel more comfortable discussing such things as sex or marital problems with another woman. Women have called the hospital asking



Sun-Times Graphic by Leslie Vasprami

specifically for a female gynecologist. They just feel that another female would be more understanding."

Jazbec believes that today's women simply expect more from their doctors; they are extremely aware and they want to be well-informed about all aspects of their health.

ELAINE LEVY, community relations director for Albany Women's Medical Center, 5086 N. Elston, concurs. "Women are demanding more from health care professionals because

they want to know exactly what is going on with their bodies. They also want to know what their choices are and then make their own decisions."

The center is one of 12 facilities specializing in various aspects of women's health that have been established in the Chicago area in the past decade.

Levy believes that women are turning to centers like Albany for many reasons including the fact that they offer health services at prices lower than most private physicians. Typical fees at Albany: Pap test, \$8; pelvic examination (including breast exam and test for gonorrhea) \$18; HCG (human chorionic gonadotrophin) pregnancy test, \$8; diaphragm fitting and exam, \$30. Last year, the center was expanded to include laparoscopic tubal ligations done on an outpatient basis (\$800) and first trimester abortions with either general or local anesthetic (\$200).

In addition to two internists and nine gynecologists (who work on a part-time basis), Albany's 11 counselors provide patient education in such things as breast self-examination, birth control methods and general health. "We stress taking the time to educate and counsel patients," Levy says. "Those are things that most doctors cannot do in a private office setting because their time is limited."

Are women's health centers just a passing fad spawned by the women's liberation movement? Levy doesn't think so. She believes that in addition to offering a wide range of services at reasonable prices, the comfort factor is a major reason why centers catering to women's needs are proliferating.

The center serves females from teens to women in their 70s but most clients are between 16 to 30. "Girls who have never had a pelvic examination come in," Levy says, "and a counselor explains the procedure to them before they see the doctor. It makes the experience easier for the girls. And we have several bilingual counselors who can speak other languages such as Spanish and Polish."

Albany's clients have access to its library of literature on issues in women's health such as data on toxic shock syndrome and pre-natal care. Counselors conduct group sessions for women who want to learn about the effectiveness and hazards of certain birth control methods. And the center's speaker's bureau provides lecturers to schools on such topics as reproductive health and the problems of teen pregnancy.