

The health of incarcerated women in BC



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This theme issue is dedicated to all women in BC who are, and who have been, incarcerated.

Most physicians in BC will eventually encounter patients in their medical practices who have previous or current incarceration experience. These women can have problems that are medically complex and they may be particularly vulnerable. Physicians are often at a loss when dealing with the vast physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of women who have been incarcerated, and can provide better care by knowing more about this population.

To aid in this, we present three educational and thought-provoking articles, beginning with “The scope of the problem: the health of incarcerated women in BC.” This article provides an overview of the correctional system, the health problems faced by incarcerated women, and the connection between health and recidivism.

The second article, “Collaborative community-prison programs for incarcerated women in BC,” describes some innovative initiatives for incarcerated women in BC. These include a screening mammography program, an HIV outreach program, a therapeutic

program, a holistic learning and healing program for Aboriginal women, an infant and mother health initiative, prison health education for UBC medical students and residents, and a nutrition and exercise program developed by incarcerated women themselves.

The third and final article in this theme issue, “Future directions for the health of incarcerated women in BC,” describes improved continuity of care in Nova Scotia, where the provincial Ministry of Health is responsible for delivering health care to provincial inmates, and findings from European research indicating the need to address gender inequity in correctional systems worldwide. We also

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include a patient handout that physicians may give to female patients who have been released from prison.

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