

WOMEN'S NOW

GENEROSITY AT WORK. REVOLUTION IN ACTION.



On the cover: Nurses and staff from Women's College Hospital's Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Care Centre

INSIDE

Revolutionizing support for survivors of gender-based violence



DELIVERING UNINTERRUPTED CARE FOR SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, the team at Women's College Hospital's Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care Centre (SA/DVCC) began to see the ripple effects of lockdown almost immediately.

On the heels of stay-at-home orders, job losses and mounting stress, evidence showing increased incidence of abuse at home began to emerge. But, the centre saw a sharp decline in patient visits. That's when the team knew they needed to adapt to ensure continued care during a time of extreme uncertainty.

"Although rates of domestic violence were rising, survivors didn't know where to turn for help as society shut down and hospitals pivoted to focus on COVID-19," says Anna Kacikanis, clinical manager of the SA/DVCC at Women's College Hospital (WCH).

As an essential service, the SA/DVCC continued offering 24/7 care even as many of the hospital's clinics ramped down in response to the pandemic. But to reach the growing number of people – primarily women – experiencing abuse at home, the team needed to get creative.

Established in 1984 as the first clinic of its kind in Ontario, the SA/DVCC provides comprehensive, trauma-informed care to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. The centre broadens its reach by partnering with seven emergency departments throughout downtown Toronto.

The Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SA/DVTC's) is also based at Women's College Hospital and provides leadership and support through education, research and care standards for 37 centres across Ontario.

As a celebrated national and global leader in its field, the SA/DVCC was well-positioned to lead the way in breaking down barriers to care during a global pandemic.

At the outset of the crisis, the team immediately focused on raising awareness of its uninterrupted 24/7 service. But with many survivors unable or unwilling to make their way into the hospital during a pandemic, they turned to technology – phone, email and video – to make sure every individual in need could access support where, when and how they needed it.

In partnership with their Ontario-wide network, the team also supported a 24/7 navigation line for both health providers and patients – providing advice, sharing resources, and connecting patients with the closest centre able to offer support.

As the world begins to look ahead to life beyond the pandemic, the SA/DVCC plans to continue leveraging the power of innovation to break down barriers to care, fueled by much-needed donations from WCH supporters and friends.

“Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we’re able to offer care in more ways than ever before, to truly meet patients where they’re at – regardless of their circumstances,” says Kacikanis. “The landscape of healthcare for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence in Ontario has never been stronger.”

For more information about the SA/DVCC, including how to access its services, please visit womenscollegehospital.ca/sadvcc.

THE “SHADOW PANDEMIC” OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Even before COVID-19, 44 percent of all women in Canada reported that they’d experienced sexual, physical, or psychological violence at the hands of an intimate partner.

As the pandemic unfolded, social service agencies in every part of the country reported that calls related to abuse at home were doubling – revealing a “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence emerging alongside COVID-19.

This secondary impact of the pandemic is profound: victims of domestic violence may experience serious physical and mental health consequences and the social and economic costs can be enormous.

The development of innovative and more accessible ways for victims to connect with care and support is more important now than ever before.

To support the SA/DVCC at Women’s College Hospital and other revolutionary advances in healthcare, visit www.wchf.ca or call 416-323-6323. Thank you!

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, as the leader in women’s health and health equity, Women’s College Hospital helped to spearhead the Women’s Health Integrated Service Delivery Initiative (WHISDI), a new collaborative partnership dedicated to serving and advocating for the health of women across the GTA, particularly those who may be experiencing barriers to quality care due to marginalization or discrimination.

Today, the initiative includes 18 organizations who focus on helping to ensure women have access to a range of services including addictions treatment, mental health support, family counseling, justice and housing support, and more.

Through this initiative, WCH continues to work to meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community and advance access to equitable healthcare for all.



A VIEW FROM THE FRONTLINE: Q&A WITH AN SA/DVCC ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE

Sukhpreet Kainth is an advanced practice nurse at Women's College Hospital's Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care Centre (SA/DVCC). We sat down (virtually!) with her to chat about her day-to-day work, the unique expertise of the nursing team at the SA/DVCC, and the importance of providing patient-centred care to survivors of gender-based violence.

What does your role as an advanced practice nurse involve?

My role is a combination of team leadership, clinical care, education, and outreach.

This year, I've spent a lot of time supporting my team as they helped patients access resources through such challenging times. For example, there were times when a shortage of shelter beds in

the city meant patients fleeing abuse struggled to find a place to stay. Through team leadership and working with our hospital and community partners, we were able to find solutions for our patients, despite the challenges.

The education and outreach side of my role is something I'm really passionate about. Since January, the team and I have engaged in over 40 outreach activities – mainly virtually due to COVID-19. This work involves connecting with partnered emergency departments and community-based agencies – like Family Health Care Teams, Covenant House or the FCJ Refugee Centre – to share information about the services we offer and how best to support patients. We also teach allied health professionals about the work of the SA/DVCC. The more outreach we do, the more patients we'll be able to see and support.

How is the nursing team at the SA/DVCC specially equipped to care for patients who have experienced gender-based violence?

My goal as a leader is to have a strong team with diverse skills that play to everyone's strengths and passions. For example, we have a nurse who specializes in training the police to better support survivors of gender-based violence and another who focuses on the impacts of strangulation. We all specialize in our respective areas and together, we're growing our knowledge and expertise to better serve the patients we see.

Our nurses also receive special training through the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres as sexual assault nurse examiners, which allows us to complete forensic examinations from a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive perspective. When survivors are receiving care, it can be re-traumatizing. Our ongoing training helps to strengthen our skills to prevent patients from feeling re-victimized.

What inspires you most about the work you do?

Although this work can be emotionally taxing, it is so rewarding to comfort a patient at their most vulnerable and greatest time of need. I see the benefits that our work has on someone who has experienced trauma, and I truly know that we're making a difference here at the SA/DVCC. Through our focus on delivering patient-centred and trauma-informed care, we're making sure that everyone we encounter receives the most empathetic and compassionate care possible.

Your generosity is directly supporting the critical care provided by the SA/DVCC. Thank you for helping to ensure survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence can access the compassionate, trauma-informed care they need and deserve.



LOOKING AHEAD: ADVANCING RESEARCH TO ADDRESS AND PREVENT SEX TRAFFICKING

Sex trafficking is a growing concern in Canada despite clear indications that it is under-researched, under-reported, and has serious health and psychosocial consequences. A billion-dollar industry, sex trafficking involves recruiting, harbouring, holding or transporting victims to exploit them for sexual purposes. The vast majority of victims are women and girls, particularly those who may be experiencing intersecting forms of marginalization.

Those who have survived sex trafficking have often been subjected to humiliation, isolation and exposure to illicit substances, and may have experienced mental and physical abuse. Survivors speak of a healthcare system that does not respond to their

unique needs, and the gaps in research have resulted in little evidence to influence healthcare models and government policy, making it difficult to identify, support and counsel those who seek help: until now.

With a groundbreaking \$1 million gift from the HART (Human Anti-trafficking Response Team) Foundation, Women's College Hospital (WCH) is establishing a vital new initiative to help address this glaring gap. This generous gift will support pioneering research that will be overseen by prominent gender-based violence sector leaders and senior scientists at Women's College Research Institute, Drs. Janice Du Mont and Robin Mason.

Du Mont and Mason have already begun laying important groundwork for the program. A research scoping review is currently underway, and the two are actively recruiting a postdoctoral fellow to lead and support a range of research activities designed to respond to and prevent sex trafficking locally, provincially and across Canada.

According to HART Foundation founder, Kelly Grier-Nadal, the group chose to partner with WCH because of the hospital's unique ability to conduct the research needed to advance knowledge about sex trafficking. "The hospital's excellence in research on gender-based violence and powerful history of support for women's health issues makes our partnership a natural fit," she says. "Together, I am confident we can move the dial and make a difference in the lives of women experiencing sex trafficking."

If you would like to learn more about Women's College Hospital's partnership with the HART Foundation and donate directly to its anti-trafficking program, please visit www.wchf.ca or call 416-323-6323.

Thank you, HART Foundation, for your leadership and partnership in addressing and preventing sex trafficking in Canada.



Kelly
Grier-Nadal
Founder



Carol
Wildgoose
Director



Tamara
Bahry
Director



Debbie
McGrath
Director

TRANS-LINK NETWORK: ENHANCING COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT TRANSGENDER SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE PROVINCE-WIDE

Every day, transgender (trans) people around the world are subjected to assault, harassment, prejudice, and discrimination, and global statistics reveal that around half of all trans people will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.

Canada is not immune: a recent report from Trans PULSE Canada found that a full 26 percent of trans people in Canada have experienced sexual assault within the past five years. Among racialized trans people, that number is even higher.

Yet, many survivors avoid seeking health and social services out of fear of facing stigma or discrimination – fear that is often rooted in traumatic past experiences such as being misgendered, shamed or doubted, or receiving poor quality care because of their gender identity.

Recognizing this critical gap, Dr. Janice Du Mont – a senior scientist with Women's College Research Institute – has launched a new project that brings together service providers from across the care continuum with the goal of promoting responsive, trans-affirming supports for survivors of sexual violence.

A collaborative effort between Women's College Hospital, the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SA/DVTCs), and various 2SLGBTQ+ organizations such as Egale Canada and Trans Wellness Ontario, the trans-LINK Project has built a province-wide, intersectoral network of 130 trans-positive community organizations and SA/DVTCs.

"The network is actually creating a two-fold impact," says Du Mont. "It's creating the potential for referral pathways to safe, comprehensive care for transgender survivors, and it's also building capacity across sectors to respond to the unique needs of transgender patients through training, education, and knowledge sharing."

To learn more about the trans-LINK Network and its broad range of resources and tools, visit the network's new WebPortal at www.translinknetwork.com.

Join the movement
to revolutionize
healthcare.
Donate today!

Giving is easy

- Call the Foundation at **416-323-6323**
- Visit www.wchf.ca and click on **Ways to Give** or **Donate**
- Visit us on the fourth floor of Women's College Hospital (76 Grenville St., Toronto)

We love hearing from you!

If you have any feedback about this issue of Women's Now, questions about donating or simply want to connect with a member of your Foundation staff team, please contact **Alex Cheesman** at alex.cheesman@wchospital.ca or **416-323-6323 ext. 2319**.


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