

OUR BODIES OURSELVES

TRANSFORMING WOMEN'S LIVES AROUND THE WORLD

◆ The Politics of Health Care Reform: Now's the Time

Ellen R. Shaffer, PhD, MPH

Congress is coming closer to passing health reform legislation. There is momentum for a bill that would include a strong public plan which would help make health care affordable. But women will have to keep up the pressure for this and other important features.

According to the National Women's Law Center, affordable health care is even more of a problem for women than for men. Seven in 10 women are either uninsured or underinsured, struggling to pay medical bills or experiencing other cost-related problems in accessing needed care. More than half (52%) of women have foregone necessary care because of cost—including not filling a prescription, skipping a medical test or failing to see a doctor when they had a medical problem—compared to 39% of men.

Three House committees, and two in the Senate, have reviewed and voted to pass different versions of legislation that would limit insurance industry practices such as excluding people with pre-existing conditions (which can include pregnancy) and would require most individuals and employers to contribute to the cost of health insurance. Four of the five bills would give people a chance to buy a public plan. Because it would not have to cover exorbitant insurance company executive bonuses and overhead, the public plan could charge a lower premium.

In the best case, it would pay providers the same rates that Medicare does to hold down hyperinflation in medical prices, plus 5% to all for some variation. It would also include current Medicare providers, meaning most hospitals and doctors; they could opt out at any time.

(The Senate Finance Committee bill excluded the public option in an attempt to win Republican votes, although Maine Senator Olympia Snowe did vote to approve the Finance Committee version. That bill would cost more and cover fewer people than the others.)

The Senate Finance plan still allows for age rating (premiums for older women could be up to four times higher compared to younger women). This is a slight improvement over the 5:1 ratio originally proposed. The House bills call for no more than 2:1. We should advocate to use the 2:1 standard in the final bill or to eliminate age rating entirely.

Seven in 10 women are either uninsured or underinsured, struggling to pay medical bills or experiencing other cost-related problems in accessing needed care.

Advocates have held the line on abortion despite incessant attacks by Republicans during Committee debate. It is still the case that federal funds cannot be used for abortion, but no new

restrictions will apply. Both reproductive health and maternity care would have to be covered benefits, which is not the case now.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi are each crafting bills that will likely go to the full House and Senate for debate by the end of October. Now's the time to speak up!

To keep up to date, subscribe to the Equal listserv for Equitable, Quality, Universal, Affordable health care. Send a blank email to: join-equal@list.equalhealth.info.

Ellen is co-director at the Center for Policy Analysis, www.centerforpolicyanalysis.org

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Potential for Change: Interning at OBOS

Jessica Planos

Jessica at the
 2009 LGBT
 Equality March in
 Washington, DC

When I came for my interview, Wendy Brovold (OBOS Communications and Marketing Manager) asked me why I wanted to intern for Our Bodies Ourselves. It had seemed so obvious to me—it's important. Yes, I'm an architecture major college student, but that doesn't make me less of a human being. (I mean, it does, but not related to this.)

Growing up, I never considered myself a feminist or otherwise enlightened. I just had all the really good books—*Our Bodies, Ourselves* being the first, followed by new classics like *The Vagina Monologues* and I [heart icon] *Female Orgasm*. I lent one to a friend, who lent it to a friend and all of a sudden I was the feminist lending library for my high school! I didn't see the books as radical, because it had never occurred to me that any rational person would disagree with women's equality or the importance of body awareness.

It has started to sink in that not everyone is as blessed as I was with access to these writings and therefore this consciousness. Women's magazines, which hold more influence over my generation than the books published during the last wave of feminism, are still espousing obedience to men's needs, men's sexuality and heteronormative social hierarchies.

I'm interning with Our Bodies Ourselves because I know my generation has great potential for change, yet can't seem to get it together. I hope that more youth involvement in this cooperative effort will encourage the simple practice of picking up a good book that tells you all that you're capable of.

Women's Health Heroes Around the World

Kiki Zeldes

In our last newsletter, we told you of our plan to honor the work of women's health advocates worldwide. After inviting nominations, we received nearly 100 submissions from 12 different countries for the 2009 Our Bodies Ourselves Women's Health Heroes Awards.

2009
WOMEN'S HEALTH *Heroes*
 Care, Education & Activism Worldwide

The nominees included exceptional women and men who are doing amazing work to improve and protect women's health and reproductive rights. Among them: an environmental peace activist; a professor of human sexuality; a state senate president; a public health nurse; an activist against genital mutilation; doulas, midwives and women who have founded organizations advocating for better births; founders of websites on chronic illness, menopause and teen sexuality, and many many others.

It was incredibly inspiring to read dozens of stories (and watch several videos) describing these heroes in such heartfelt ways. More than 1,000 readers submitted comments supporting their favorites. Our initial plan was to honor two nominees, but we quickly realized it would be impossible to choose. We instead decided to "induct" 20 heroes for 2009 and to make this an annual event. Check out the 2009 heroes at www.ourbodiesourblog.org/womens-health-heroes-2009.

Nominations will open in April for the 2010 Women's Health Heroes Awards.

Grassroots Goes Global: Reaching Out to 22 Countries

Ayesha Chatterjee and Sally Whelan

The Global Our Bodies Ourselves Network is a coalition of women's groups in 22 countries whose vision and energy is bringing health and sexuality information to millions around the world.

In **Nigeria**, women are culturally adapting *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into local dialects to reach 1.5 million women and girls through peer education with village hairdressers, posters on the local canoe system that connects remote farms to markets and an innovative motorbike campaign; a group of enthused elder women is making tee-shirts and meals for the 200 outreach volunteers involved in these grassroots initiatives.

In a campaign organized by a group adapting *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into Turkish, young women in **Istanbul** are sporting badges with the slogan "Bendinim Benimdir" (My Body is Mine) and distributing brochures that say: "I am entitled to climb a tree... enjoy the public sphere...and am the only one to have a say on my sexuality and fertility...."

A cross-border collaboration between groups in **India** and **Bangladesh** is developing a Bangla adaptation and has managed to get half of the paper and printing costs donated by a local printer who is impressed with the project.

As many of you know, the journey began in 1969 with the first edition. Since then, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has influenced generations of Americans and inspired women in every region of the world to culturally adapt its content to their own realities. Adaptations have been produced in 24 languages, in a staggering range of formats, with new ones underway in another 11.

Women continue to claim it as the one book that most reliably addresses their needs, approaching us for permission to adapt it

and working in close and ongoing partnership with our Global Translation/Adaptation Program through the project life cycle.

Nearly all of our partners live in places where accurate health information is scarce or nonexistent. Most are grassroots groups with limited funds; some face ongoing threats as they courageously empower women and girls in their communities. These collaborations are critical to reaching as many women as possible and securing systemic change, locally and nationally.

Two striking examples: In **Nepal**, a group developing a Nepali adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* worked with partners to facilitate the inclusion of reproductive rights in the country's interim constitution; and in **Israel**, a group adapting *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into Hebrew and Arabic has been recognized as "a peace initiative bringing together Jewish and Arab women...."

As *Our Bodies, Ourselves* continues to evolve into a dynamic and inspirational tool for women's health literacy and coalition-building, the Global Our Bodies Ourselves Network exemplifies the strength of women's voices raised in action, informing, leading and changing their communities.



(c) Jane Pincus

Take the Night, Make it Day

We've nominated the Global Our Bodies Ourselves Network to the "Half the Sky" contest organized by Nicolas Kristof, Sheryl WuDunn and the New York Times. Based on the Chinese proverb "Women Hold Up Half the Sky," this contest invited projects that address the most pressing issues affecting women and girls around the world. In the spirit of "Half the Sky" - and the courageous network of women producing adaptations of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* - the above collage, designed by Jane Pincus, a co-founder of *Our Bodies Ourselves* and co-author of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, depicts a young girl holding up the sky.

On May 31, 2009, abortion provider Dr. George Tiller was gunned down by an anti-abortion activist, the fourth physician in the United States to be murdered since 1993. Dr. Tiller's courage, commitment and resolve to "trust women" inspires us to keep working toward a world in which women are respected and supported in their times of need.



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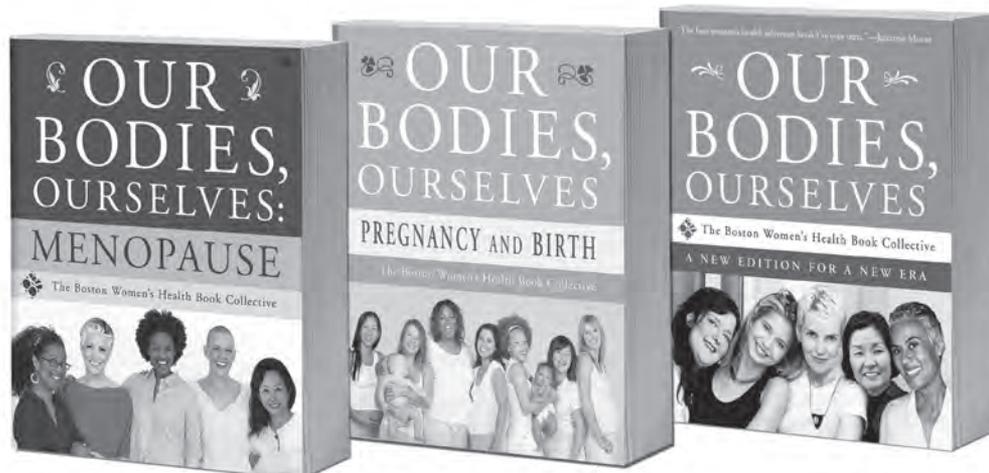
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Our Holiday Gift to Health Care Providers!

As a special thank you to health care providers, we're offering *Our Bodies, Ourselves, Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause* at 50% off the cover price. This offer is available to clinics and other groups who provide health counseling services.

Please contact Wendy Brovold at 617-245-0200x13 or wendy@bwhbc.org for more information.



**Health care
providers
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