



When all is said and done, what do women really want?

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Women's Health Week has just passed. Women were advised "to do" a bunch of things. This included getting physical activity each week, eating a nutritious diet, getting preventive health screening recommended by the medical pooh-bahs, avoiding risky behavior (oh, help — unprotected sex, smoking, weight gain, not wearing a seatbelts), having mindfulness about mental health (whatever that is...) and an impressive list of suggestions made by President Obama in his perhaps perfunctory "Proclamation for National Women's Health Week".

Stop — Look — Listen — Think. What truly comprises women's health? What perhaps might women genuinely need and want in order to access and maintain a level of health that is important, useful, and meaningful to them? I expect every woman has her own "list".

Here are some on my list:

1. Equity in the work place so that equal pay is provided for equal work. Seventy cents on the dollar for women isn't fair, right or good enough. Women pay taxes on the money they earn. They are also a substantial and crucial segment of the population who comprise the sole "bread winners" for their families. One might ask — "What is wrong with this picture?"
2. A breakthrough is needed in the "glass ceiling" to improve equal opportunity in the work place. Discrimination toward ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, physical disability, sexual persuasion, and age have no place if equal opportunity and equal competence to do the work are intelligently considered.
3. Equity in child care responsibility and accountability.
4. Access to health care that is preventive, clinically relevant, educational, participatory between patients and health care providers, and mindful of the public health implications in personal health needs. I believe this can and will happen when we determine that we shall have universal health care access. A foundation for this will be a single-payer health care system.
5. Respect and safety for children and elders.
6. Freedom from violence. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, social, military, institutional, religious, political and economic violence. Freedom from violence will also focus equally on elders, children, men, the vulnerable in our community and the environment.
7. A direct and realistic evaluation of the very serious burden of alcohol consumption on individuals, families and society in our community (for starters — motor vehicle accidents, family neglect, homicides, emergency room visits and hospitalizations, domestic violence, acute/chronic illnesses, suicides, child abuse).
8. Encouragement and support for women to attain their desired level of education and vocational training. A high school education and/or a GED can be a very good springboard.
9. Education and equity for access to reproductive and general health care.
10. Enfranchisement for every woman to commit to her own "participatory democracy" in local, state, and national political discourse and voting.

I believe that all of these are critical to good health — whether it is personal, family, community, state, national or worldwide.

A modest reflection on this list for women's health will suggest that, in my view, many men perhaps really do want the same.

It can be done if we make that decision.

- Brown is a resident of Douglas.

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