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What is SWANzine?

The SWANzine newsletter is a guide to health, legal, social, employment, and community information for women engaged in indoor sex work in the Lower Mainland. English and Chinese versions are available. If you require SWANzine in another language, please let us know.



If there is a topic you would like to see in SWANzine, please send us your questions or comments to info@swanvancouver.ca

SWAN Announcement

Abuser Alert - SWAN launches an online reporting system

Sometimes you report bad clients and ask us to share this information with other women to help keep everyone safer. Until now, we have not had an effective way to share this information but since you asked, we created an online reporting tool specifically for women working at indoor locations.

You can report bad clients for a variety of reasons including: non-payment, theft, assault, stalking, violence, etc. There is even an option to report police officers or bylaws enforcement officers if they are involved in workplace issues.

When you report a bad client you have the option to share information with one or a combination of the following: 1) SWAN only, 2) other women who have signed up for the alert, 3) police if you would like to make a formal statement (SWAN can support you in this process)



Only women who have signed up for the alerts will receive the information as we do not want the information going out to the general public. To sign up, please text "alert" to **604 719 6343** or email info@swanvancouver.ca and write "alert" in the subject line.

Please check out the Abuser Alert at <http://swanvancouver.ca/abuser-alert/> and let us know what you think. This is a new service so any feedback you provide to improve the reporting system is greatly appreciated.

Please note: Many women already have networks for sharing work-related information. We aim to complement these networks and provide a platform for those that might not have access to other sources of information.



News from the City of Vancouver

New Policy for City Employees



The City of Vancouver has new Sex Work Response Guidelines for City employees. These Guidelines were developed to promote a respectful, nondiscriminatory and consistent approach among City employees who interact with anyone in the sex industry through the course of their duties.

The policy includes the following:

“Adult consensual sex work is in itself not a by-law violation.”

“The City of Vancouver recognizes that any policy which inhibits people from safe sex practices is counteractive to the health and safety of all residents. Therefore, **the use of safe sex materials such as condoms and educational materials is not a by-law violation.**”

“Employees are encouraged to separate personal values and morals regarding sex work from their profession in order to perform their duties with fairness, objectivity and impartiality.”

To read the Guidelines in their entirety, go to <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/sex-work-response-guidelines.pdf>

For more information about the City of Vancouver’s position on sex work and its efforts to increase the health, safety and well-being of women who do sex work, go to <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/Health-and-safety-for-sex-workers.aspx>

If you feel City employees are not following these guidelines, please let SWAN know as soon as possible.

The City of Vancouver’s policy complements the 2013 Vancouver Police Department’s Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines which changed the VPD’s approach from the criminalization of sex workers to relationship-building and safety. The VPD’s policy states, **“sex work involving consenting adults is not an enforcement priority for the VPD”**.



To read the Guidelines in their entirety, go to <http://vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/sex-enforcement-guidelines.pdf>

If you feel Vancouver police officers are not following these guidelines, please let SWAN know as soon as possible.



Women should be able to work safely without judgment! At SWAN we work very hard to reduce work-related stigma and judgment.

Because of the work we do is also stigmatized, we cannot rely on mainstream funders like other community organizations.



If you or someone you know likes what we do and would like to support our work, please consider donating! No amount is too small!

Please visit <http://swanvancouver.ca/donate/> to donate through PayPal.



SWAN: What We Do



You may know us as the “condom ladies” or “the nurses” but our staff and volunteers do a whole lot more than distribute condoms.

Health Services: We are NOT nurses but we can connect you with one. We can also provide translation or accompaniment to health appointments. We work hard to ensure that the health care providers we refer you to are non-judgmental and do not ask intrusive questions that are beyond what is necessary to provide health care. SWAN does not feel it is always necessary to disclose the work you do when visiting a health care provider. We work with health care providers to ensure they are mindful of the type and amount of information they ask. If you visit a health care provider and receive discriminatory or judgmental health care, please let SWAN know. Without disclosing your name, we can follow up with the clinic to advocate for better health care services not only for you but for other women as well.

Bylaws & Business License Information: SWAN can find answers to your bylaws or business license questions. We can also advocate on your behalf if you feel you have been treated unfairly by a bylaws inspector or the business licensing department.

Police and Immigration Accountability: Massage shop 'visits' or raids by authorities happen. SWAN takes a position that raids are an unnecessary use of force and cause a lot of stress. Since our outreach area is extensive, SWAN can piece together what authorities are doing in the Lower Mainland even when we do not receive clear answers from authorities. Help us help you! If you have been raided or visited by authorities, please let us know. In our efforts to hold authorities accountable, we do not disclose your name or workplace without your permission but rather speak generally or use hypothetical situations. We are mindful of the fear and intimidation authorities create with these raids. Raids are unacceptable in other types of businesses and we work hard to stop this practice in massage shops and other indoor venues.

Reporting Violence: If you have been a victim of violence, SWAN can help you explore your options. This may include discussing personal or workplace safety. If you are considering reporting to the police, SWAN can discuss the risks and benefits of doing so, provide information about what reporting entails and accompany you to report. If you report incidents to police, you may qualify for the Crime Victim Assistance Program (www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/financial/) and we can help you with the application if necessary.

General Questions: If you have other work-related questions, give us a call at 604-719-6343. We will try our best to answer them. If we do not know the answer, we will coordinate with trusted partners in order to respond to your concerns.



Questions to ask about the workplace

Workplaces can be very different, with different rules, policies, management styles and expectations of workers. It is up to you to decide what kind of workplace suits you best. To make sure you have enough information to make the right decision about where to work, consider discussing the following questions with management to avoid miscommunication or workplace conflict. Whether you are looking for a new job or staying in the job you have, discussing these questions can make workplace policies and practices clearer.

Workplace practices

- How is the pay divided between workers and management? When am I paid (daily, weekly, biweekly)?
- Who takes care of advertising-management or me? What services are advertised?
- Who decides what services I provide? If there is disagreement or miscommunication about services, how is this resolved?
- Are outcalls a part of my job? Is there a driver? What other safety measures are in place?
- What safety measures are there in the workplace? For example, are there security cameras or a phone/buzzer in the room? Am I expected to work alone at any time?
- If I receive a fine by city by-laws inspectors, who pays the fine?
- Are workplace policies or rules communicated verbally or in writing? Are there fines or consequences for not following workplace policies or rules?
- Does this workplace receive visits from people other than clients? E.g. law enforcement? How is this dealt with?

Clients

- Who screens clients? How?
- Do workers get to choose clients? Do clients choose workers? Do workers rotate? Do workers participate in a line-up?
- Can I refuse to see clients for example, if they are drunk, aggressive, etc?
- What happens if there is a bad client? What happens if I no longer feel safe with a client during a session and need to end the session immediately? Will management support me?
- Is it policy to collect fees from clients before or after providing services, or can I choose? Do I collect the fees or does the manager or receptionist collect the fees?
- What happens if a client steals from me or refuses to pay? Will the manager or receptionist help me if this happens?

Health

- Can I choose whether condoms are used? Can I refuse requests for services without a condom?
- Who provides the condoms? Lube? What supplies are available to ensure workers' health and safety?
- Where can I go for help if there is a health-related issue at work or if I am seeking health information?

Are there any other questions you ask before you start working in a new place?

Is there any other information you think workers should ask for before they start working?



Feel free to share your ideas with us at info@swanvancouver.ca or by phone call/text at 604 719 6343 or 778 865 6343 (Chinese)



At SWAN, we refer whenever possible to only health, social, legal, etc., professionals who are sex work friendly; that is to say, professionals who provide respectful, non-judgmental services to women who do sex work.



We are hoping to add to our referral list and who better to know than you?



If you know non-judgmental service providers, please let us know at info@swanvancouver.ca or text/call 604 719 6343.

Community Health Resource

SWAN connects women with community resources. This month we introduce a sexual assault service that is helpful for all women to know about. Sexual assault can happen to anyone and it is important to know that services are available if needed. Sexual assault refers to all incidents of unwanted sexual activity including sexual attacks and rape.

Sexual assault services are provided 24/7 by a team of specially trained female nurses at local hospitals. These services include assessment and treatment of injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy prevention as well as forensic evidence collection.

Here is what a visit with a sexual assault nurse will look like:

An emergency nurse will ask you a few questions about your health, and then contact the specially trained sexual assault nurse. You will have choices about which type of care you want to receive: health care only, health care and collection of forensic samples for report to the police, or health care and collection of forensic samples for storage for up to one year, in case you want to report later. It is your choice whether or not you want to report the sexual assault to the police. If you think you might want to report to the police now or at a later time, the nurse can collect forensic samples and summarize their findings in a medical legal report that can be used in court. Forensic samples can consist of things like the documentation of injuries, the collection of swabs, as well as an examination of areas related to the sexual assault. Your clothes may be kept by legal authorities as they are considered evidence. You have the right to a complete a medical examination even if you decide not to have forensic samples collected.

It is best to go as soon as you can after the assault, but the examination can still be provided within 7 days. Before going to the hospital, try not to pee (if you have to, collect it in a clean container and bring it with you, write down what time you collected it), poop, shower/take a bath, douche/wash your genitals, change your clothes, brush your teeth, floss, chew gum, or brush your hair. This is because there may be evidence found in those places. If you have already done any of the above, you can still get examined at the hospital.

The service can be accessed at the emergency departments of:

Vancouver General Hospital or Surrey Memorial Hospital
920 West 10th Avenue, Vancouver 13750 96 Avenue, Surrey

If the sexual assault happens in Burnaby or Richmond, please go to Vancouver General or Surrey Memorial emergency rooms to see a sexual assault nurse. There are community agencies that can assist you with transportation. Please contact SWAN for more details.



To douche or not to douche?

What is douching?

A vaginal douche is a process of rinsing or cleaning the vagina by forcing water or another solution into the vaginal cavity to flush away vaginal discharge or other contents.

What are the dangers of douching?

Douching is not recommended as a safe or healthy way to routinely clean the vagina. Douching the vagina changes the delicate chemical balance in the vagina and make a woman more at risk for infections. Douching can introduce new bacteria into the vagina. These bacteria can spread up through the cervix, uterus, and fallopian tubes. Douching washes away the normal bacteria that are friendly. Research has shown that women who douche on a routine basis tend to have more problems than women who do not douche. These problems include vaginal irritation, and sexually transmitted infections. Women who douche often are also more at risk for getting pelvic inflammatory disease, an infection of a woman's pelvic organs. It is caused by bacteria, which can travel from a woman's vagina and cervix up into her pelvic organs. If left untreated, PID can lead to infertility.

Do not douche if a condom breaks or after unprotected sex. Douching may force the sperm and possible STIs further up into the uterus.

For these reasons, douching is no longer recommended as a safe or healthy way to routinely clean the vagina. The only safe and healthy way to clean the vagina is to let the vagina clean itself.

How does the vagina clean itself?

The vagina cleans itself naturally with its own mucous secretions. When bathing or showering, use warm water and gentle unscented soap to clean the outer areas of the vagina. A bath with a few drops of tea tree oil is a relaxing way of unwinding after a shift. Feminine hygiene products such as soaps, powders, and sprays are not necessary and may lead to irritation of sensitive tissues. The typically, healthy vagina is self-cleaning.

Seek the advice of your doctor or sexual health clinic if any of the following occur: vaginal pain, vaginal itching, vaginal burning, an unpleasant smell from your vagina, painful irritation, any vaginal discharge that is different from your normal discharge, such as thick and white, cottage cheese-like, or yellowish-green. These symptoms are indicative of a number of different conditions, from yeast infections to bacterial infections, STIs and urinary tract infections—all of which are treatable with prescription medication. If you suspect you have a vaginal infection, contact your healthcare provider for a diagnosis and treatment. Don't try to wash it away with a douche.

To douche or not to douche? Simply stated, the answer is "no". The vagina has a very efficient self-cleansing mechanism and routine douching is not recommended as it gets rid of the bacteria that naturally occurs in the vagina.

**Reprinted from RED Magazine from Resourcing Health & Education (RhED) in the Sex Industry, Australia



HEALTH CLINICS

VANCOUVER

Women's Health Collective
BC Women's Nurse
Practitioners 29 West Hastings
604-736-5262 All ages. Women
only. *Check-ups *Diagnosis
and prescriptions *Specialist
referrals *Birth control *Pap
tests *STI & HIV testing.
Monday 9:30am-4:30pm
Tuesday-Thursday 1:00p,-
4:30pm Friday 9:30am-1:30pm.
Free services. Will not share
results with family doctor if
requested.

BCCDC Clinic Drop-in Clinic
1170 Bute St. 11-6:30 Mon-Fri.
All ages. Offers: *STI & HIV
testing *Birth control *Hepatitis
B vaccine. Free and
confidential. No MSP required.

BURNABY

Options for Sexual Health Clinic
4734 Imperial 604-731-4252
All ages. Offers: *Birth control
*pregnancy testing and options
*STI & HIV testing. Wednesdays
7pm-9pm

RICHMOND

Youth Clinic 8100 Granville 604-
233-3204. 21 and under. *STI &
HIV testing *Birth control
*Morning after pill free for all
ages. Monday & Wednesday
3:30pm-5:30pm, Friday 1pm-
4pm

**For clinics in other
municipalities, check SWAN's
Health Page on our website.**



Supporting Women's Alternatives Network of Vancouver

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