



Eastern Mass Chapter Newsletter

The Voice of Midlife and Older Women

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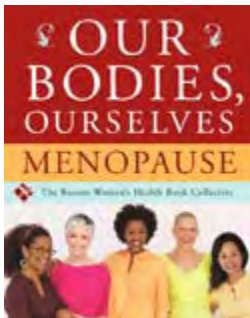
November/December 2006

Join us on Tuesday, December 5th for a presentation and book-signing for the recently published "**Our Bodies, Our Selves: Menopause**," from the Boston Women's Health Book Collective! (See Calendar below for more information.)

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Notes from the Chair



Dear OWL Members,

The change of life, hot flashes, night sweats, etc. For some of us, the menopause transition is something we are anticipating, for others it is a present reality, and for still others it is a distant memory. Whatever stage we are at, we need good information to navigate this phase of our lives and to understand what has changed and what hasn't. Do we view it positively or negatively? Should we fight it or embrace it?

On Tuesday, December 5th we will be holding a special meeting which will be open to the public on the topic of menopause and midlife. Joan Ditzion, a co-founder of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and co-author, will be speaking about the collective's new book, [Our Bodies Ourselves: Menopause](#).

Many of you are familiar with *Our Bodies Ourselves*, a sensible, practical, empowering guide to the health care questions women ask about their bodies. This new book based on the most up to date information looks not just at the physical aspect of menopause but also the cultural, psychological, social, and political context of women's experiences. With the special perspective of women themselves, the book examines the health care decisions we make in mid-life and the meaning and impact of these decisions on our lives.

Join us for this presentation and the chance to discuss with other women the personal and the political implications of how we view menopause. Get your signed copy of the new book just released and enjoy coffee and treats with friends. I hope to see you on the 5th.

Sincerely, Ellen A. Bruce

The ABZs of Women in Public Policy



During October and November, 2006, four OWL members participated in a four-session workshop, *The ABZs of Women in Public Policy*, conducted by Judith Meredith and Deborah Halliday of [The Public Policy Institute](#). Teams of women from several nonprofit organizations joined together to learn how to orchestrate their own grass-roots campaigns to effect

change. Objectives of the workshop included understanding how Massachusetts public policy is made and how non-profit organizations can impact policy, in addition to learning strategies for “operating successfully in the white, male-dominated world of policy and politics.” Participants were introduced to the 'Advocacy Power Prism,' a structural framework for planning a campaign around a particular issue. Making up the prism framework are specific organizing steps, including building and maintaining a coalition, identifying grassroots and key contacts, obtaining media coverage and advocacy for the issue, researching the issue and learning about existing policy, bringing the issue to the forefront of legislators’ agendas through lobbying and legislative advocacy, and determining budgetary needs and fundraising mechanisms.

During the workshop the OWL members chose gender-neutral annuities as an issue to begin to build a campaign around. In Massachusetts, annuities are often purchased for future retirement income. However, a woman may pay a larger premium to get the same monthly benefit as a man or get a smaller monthly annuity payout for an equivalent investment. The argument for this practice is that women on average have longer life expectancies than men. However, this is not necessarily the case for individual women and this practice is not applied in other areas such as social security.

Called an outstanding equal rights issue, *An Act Relative to Equitable Coverage in Annuity Policies* was sponsored last year by Rep. Ruth Balser and Sen. Therese Murray and passed the House and the Senate, but at the last minute wasn’t brought to the floor for a final vote. Ellen Bruce testified last spring on the inequities of annuities for women in Massachusetts. A previous article by her, *The Application of Unisex Annuity Tables to Retirement Plans* can be found in a 1999 issue (Vol. 11, No. 1) of the Journal of Aging and Social Policy.

Invaluable to the experience of this policy workshop were the “tools” that the participants were able to bring back to their individual organizations. These include [The Real Clout Workbook](#) with guidelines and process worksheets that help activists define issues clearly and formulate strategies for getting the issues on legislators’ agendas. The workbook is a companion to *Real Clout: A How-To-Manual for Community Activists Trying to Expand Healthcare Access by Changing Public Policy* by Judith Meredith and Catherine Dunham.

At the end of the workshop participants discussed how the learning experience influenced them. All agreed that in addition to appreciation for the political and policy expertise of the presenters, they all shared a sense of connection within and between the participating groups for “the community of women working hard to impact policy on behalf of issues that concern them.”

Belly Dancing: A fitness Activity for All Ages



At a recent OWL meeting, members discussed the merits of belly dancing for women of all ages. Here is one member's initial experience.

Here we are, an unexpected mix of women, various backgrounds, shapes, sizes, and ages. Yet we are here united in one common purpose, belly dancing. While there is debate as to its inception, belly dancing has been used to prepare women for childbirth, as a fertility blessing for newly married couples, and for entertainment.

Awkwardly, timidly, we begin the challenge of the isolation movements inherent in the dance. Ouch! I didn’t know that muscle was there! We’re supposed to do what? I didn’t know those moved independently of each other. Yet, as the ancient rhythms fill the room our bodies begin to undulate in harmony with

the music. Somewhere deep within ourselves, we begin to connect with this celebration of womanhood, femininity, and strength.

Calendar

November 29, 2006 - Release of *State of Women: A County by County Report on the State of Women and Girls in Massachusetts*. 11-12 p.m., Grand Staircase, State House, 617-626-6520, www.mass.gov/women

December 5, 2006 - *Menopause & Beyond: The Myths and Realities of Midlife Women*, 2-3 p.m., 4th Floor Student Lounge (Rm. 148), Wheatley Hall, University of Massachusetts Boston, 617-287-7305

December 6, 2006 - *The Massachusetts Conference for Women*, Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, <http://www.maconferenceforwomen.org/index.htm>

December 12, 2006 - *On the Edge: A Challenging and Uncertain Future for Boston Elders*, an UNDERSTANDING BOSTON Forum, 8:30-10:30 a.m., The Boston Foundation, 75 Arlington Street (10th Floor). To reserve a seat call 617-338-4390 or email rsvp at www.tbf.org by December 8.

December 13, 2006 - State-wide release of *On the Edge*, 10-11 a.m., Worcester Senior Center. For more information call 617-476-0804.

January 25, 2007 (4th Thursday) - Elder Caucus Meeting, State House

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