

# Women's health involves more than headaches and hormones



By Carol Trapani  
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If you're a woman, how many times have you gotten the impression from your physician that your physical and mental health begins and ends with your reproductive organs?

Or that your aches and pains are all in your mind?

Or that if you can't cope with a screaming, chaotic supper hour with hubby and the kids that there's something wrong with you?

Pat Camillo, R.N., decided to become a certified nurse-practitioner in the field of women's health because of first-hand experience with a health care system that never met her needs as a woman and as a person.

"Even as a nurse I didn't understand what was going on with my own body," she said.

"I had a hard time. There was no one to turn to."

Recently, Camillo joined forces with Dr. George Verrilli, a physician who practices in Rhinebeck and Hyde Park under the banner of Hudson Valley Associates in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Among the services she offers are the traditional Pap smear and annual exam, including instruction in breast self-examination; diagnosis and treatment of common gynecological problems; counseling in nutrition and infertility and grief counseling and crisis intervention.

In addition, she and other health professionals have opened The Northern Dutchess Childbirth Education Center in 4 Garden St., Rhinebeck. The center, she said, is not connected with Dr. Verrilli.

Her nursing practitioner certification is through the Nurses Association of the College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. She has a master's in women's health care which she says certifies her as a clinical nurse specialist in women's health.

Her study was done at the University of Rochester, which has one of perhaps three such graduate programs in the nation.

"The public can be easily misled about nurse-practitioners," she said. "Not every nurse-practitioner is certified. Many come from certification programs of 6 to 8 months. It's all defined within the profession, but not to the public."

She says the public needs proof and that consumers don't question enough.

While Camillo herself felt the need for a health care system that met her needs, she defends physicians in general and her views of them may come as surprising.

"Many physicians are sensitive and do meet the needs of the patient," she said. "But patients shouldn't expect it. People can find it in the nurse specialist."

Camillo said she doesn't necessarily see sensitivity as a necessary quality in physicians, but certainly as a desirable quality in nurses.

"If doctors have it, fine. If they don't, you can't blame them. Medical schools are just beginning to teach it and there is so much to learn to become a physician...how would you like to have to know all the veins in the body? I wouldn't, but I sure would want my doctor to know."

Women's health is a new specialty in the nursing profession, Camillo said.

She said its development likely sprung from the women's liberation movement of the 60s, when women's awareness was raised about their bodies.

"Women's health," said Camillo, "looks at women through life, and not just their reproductive organs, but as a whole person."

Camillo's clients get a complete physical, she said, "and then we sit back and talk about their history and what they perceive as problems. That's important...I wish I had someone I could have gone to who was a non-physician who could meet my needs."

She meets with Verrilli once a week to discuss any problems or to refer him to people she thinks he should see.

Medically, Camillo deals only with common problems. "I don't do everything," she says. "Once it gets beyond what I'm able to deal with, Dr. Verrilli takes over."

Verrilli doesn't see Camillo as a threat to his profession or practice, he said.

In fact, he says this is the way medicine will be practiced in the future.

"There are a lot of things all of us can do in one business," he said, "that require levels of care and participation and there are things I do every day that perhaps can be done better."

He described Camillo as a person who handles the social-medical aspects of the practice well and, he said, at a lower cost.

"So you have quality of care and cost containment. Plus, she's female and I think

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Pat Camillo conducts a conference at the Northern Dutchess Childbirth Education Center in Rhinebeck. The aim of the center is to meet the needs of expectant parents.