



## BC tackles whiplash-injury problem

British Columbia's rate for whiplash-injury claims is among the highest in the world, with some 50 000 accidents costing almost \$500 million a

year. These sobering statistics, combined with the world's first significant documentation of whiplash injury by the Quebec Task Force on Whiplash-Associated Disorders, are the driving forces behind the newly launched BC Whiplash Initiative.

The program, the largest continuing medical education initiative in the province's history, represents a joint effort by the BC College of Family Physicians, the Insurance Corporation of BC (ICBC), and the Department of Family Practice and the

## Computer enhances doctor-patient relationship

Breast cancer patients at a Winnipeg oncology clinic are testing a touch-screen computer program that helps them identify their information needs and the role they want to play during treatment.

"It's a low-dose intervention," comments Dr. Lesley Degner of the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Centre, who is principal investigator during a clinical trial of the system.

Approximately 280 patients have participated to date. The women are divided into 2 groups: members of 1 group use the computer and members of the other respond to the same questions but on paper. Those using the computer receive a printout. After seeing the

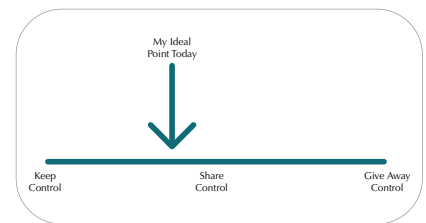
doctor, both groups of patients are given a patient satisfaction questionnaire to ascertain the results of the visit. It determines whether the patient achieved her desired level of decision-making and whether she obtained the information she wanted.

The researchers have determined that the process of identifying role preference and information needs has caused women to think more about these issues. "It solidifies [preferences] when women see the printout," said Degner.

Degner, a registered nurse, said there is little in the medical literature to indicate whether physicians ask patients about their information needs. This study not only will

provide a breakdown on information needs and role preferences according to age but also will help document whether physicians are asking patients the right questions.

The study, funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Initiative, follows 2 previous studies by Degner. The first assessed the information needs and treatment-participation



This sample printout shows the role the patient wants to play on the day of the visit. She wants to play a slightly stronger role in decision-making while still working closely with the physician.

choices of breast cancer patients. It found that about two-thirds of the 1012 women surveyed wanted to be involved in their treatment choices (Degner LF, Kristjanson LJ, Bowman D, Sloan JA, Carriere KC, O'Neil J, et al. Information needs and decisional preferences in women with breast cancer. *JAMA* 1997;277:1485-92). Less than half, however, believed they were able to participate to the degree they wished.

In another study, Degner and colleagues monitored 278 breast cancer patients to find out if their information needs changed following their diagnosis. They also looked at the extent to which patient participation in treatment decisions predicted psychosocial outcomes such as anxiety, depression and regret about decisions. Results from this study are currently being analysed. — © Jane Stewart



Principal investigator Dr. Lesley Degner (standing) and research nurse Luella Sinha look on as patient Mary Barwinsky selects her role preferences by touching computer screen