



HER HEART MATTERS

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Taira Birnie, BScKin

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Biography

Taira Birnie, BScKin has been involved in cardiology for nearly 25 years. First she worked as a cardiopulmonary tech in the cardiac catheterization lab, then as a case manager for cardiac rehabilitation at Vancouver General Hospital. Her educational background in kinesiology, a lifetime of sport and health pursuits, and passion for education and advocacy in cardiac disease prevention and management have led to a rewarding career.

April 2009 saw the official opening of the Leslie Diamond Women's Heart Health Clinic at Vancouver General Hospital. The cardiac rehab program initiated their first *Women's Cardiac Rehab* class with Taira as the lead, to help address some of the known barriers limiting women from participating in cardiac rehabilitation. Then a unique opportunity arose in 2011, when multiple women diagnosed with Spontaneous Coronary Artery Disease (SCAD) were referred to our women's rehab program by Dr. Jacqueline Saw, world renowned SCAD expert. SCAD specific rehab exercise and education classes were born, enrolling approximately 250 participants over the past 11+ years.

Taira has seen women embracing the services of cardiac rehabilitation and becoming advocates themselves. An example of this is the SCAD BC peer support group - initially SCAD Rehab classmates meeting at the clinic before or after class. It now offers twice monthly virtual meetings open to anyone affected by SCAD. Taira has been involved in the VanSCAD organizing committee since its inaugural meeting Sept 2018. See www.vanscad.ca for details on the upcoming May 2023 event.

Taira is also a person with lived experience, as she has been diagnosed with Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Dysplasia/Cardiomyopathy (ARVD/C). A rare familial disorder that may cause ventricular tachycardia and sudden death in young, apparently healthy individuals. She received an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) in 2022 and is keen on sharing her experience and knowledge with others affected with heart disease. She finds it ironic but helpful to see heart disease from both care provider and patient point of view.