

## Listen to the News Wisely

Bev Stevenson RN BN PNG

(Registered Nurse, Bachelor of Nursing, Pretty Nice Gal)

*Bev Stevenson is a veritable human encyclopedia of somewhat useless, mostly amusing but occasionally helpful stories and dubious facts. She works as an Emergency Nurse in Calgary, a Stand Up Comic, and is a Strathcona Resident.*

Welcome, Readers, to my very first Strathcona Gazette Column! I hope to educate and entertain you about topics that YOU find interesting and pertinent in my regularly featured column. Please forward any feedback &/or topics of interest to strathconachristie@shaw.ca

I pondered my first topic for many days, weeks, possibly years. I figured that the majority of Gazette readers might be of female persuasion, so I considered Women's Health issues to be a suitable topic. But... where to start? Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) has certainly been in the news. Breast cancer? What else??? Gaaaah! The cranial effort of producing topics had broken me out into a cold sweat – what about MENOPAUSE? My heart was pounding rapidly in my chest - could it be HEART DISEASE? I felt short of breath - how about SMOKING??? Then I had an overwhelming urge to void...how about URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS??? Feeling faint now, I had to go lie down before I fell down and broke a hip! OSTEOPOROSIS! Gaaaaah (again)!!! Where were the voices in my head when I needed them????

Then the topic came to me - the topic is WHAT TOPIC!?? The media often seems to narrowly focus on one statistically insignificant event or topic at a time, leading the Average Josephine to believe that there is just one important disease or health concern. (Don't even get me started about S.A.R.S.....) A good example would be the mega-hype that occurred around the handful of infections and tragic deaths in Alberta in 2001 from meningitis (an age-old occasionally fatal bacterial or viral brain inflammation). If you believed the media, it seemed that meningitis clouds were swarming towns overflowing their cemeteries with victims! (You can kill yourself with a pencil, but do you ever hear about that??) This media frenzy helped fuel the Alberta government into spending several million dollars on meningitis vaccines.

On the other (less reported, less popular and infinitely more depressing) hand, also in 2001, just a fraction of that amount was spent on bike helmet safety education. It is well documented that head injuries affect 100's of Albertans every year. Hundreds!

That huge vaccine budget could have been better used to buy a helmet for every active Albertan...with a safety lesson or two thrown in! Another amazingly true statistic: Every \$1 spent on bike helmet safety will save \$30 on health care spending, treating those victims of preventable head injuries (ie those injured while not wearing helmets, some of whom will unfortunately live out their lives institutionalized... How tragic!)

So, millions of dollars are spent to vaccinate against a rare disease while a fraction of that budget is allocated to combat often debilitating and sometimes fatal PREVENTABLE and PREDICTABLE head injuries. Your chances of falling on your head are a lot higher than winning the lottery...do you see where I'm going with this?

It is very important for you to listen to the news. This is true. But do it wisely. Or, heed the advice of a talented, trusted and perky health professional /comedienne to guide you through it all! But, um...it looks like I've run out of room for today. Better check out the next Gazette for more information!

*Originally published in the  
Strathcona Gazette, May 2003.*