

iCON-VCH INDIGENOUS HEALTH ROUNDS

On February 25, 2022, iCON and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Indigenous Health hosted a virtual Indigenous Health Round, titled

Trauma-Informed Care for Indigenous Patients and Families in Healthcare Settings

We were honoured to have our speakers from the Kilala Lelum Health Centre: **ELDER BRUCE ROBINSON**, a Family Support Elder and Cultural Advisor from the Nisga'a Nation, and **DR. ALANA HIRSH**, a McGill and UBC-trained family physician and UBC Clinical Assistant Professor with expertise in addiction medicine, emergency medicine, and trauma-informed care.

The full recording is available at <https://youtu.be/alqWD2Tah4s>.
Below are key messages from the talk.

How is Healthcare Experienced by Indigenous Patients?¹

Widespread stereotyping, racism and profiling of Indigenous people



Racism limits access to medical treatment, negatively affecting the health of Indigenous People in B.C.



Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately impacted



Public health emergencies are magnifying racism, disproportionately impacting Indigenous Peoples



Indigenous healthcare workers and students face significant racism and discrimination in their work and study environments



Our current understanding and practice are grounded in a colonial mindset.

Worldviews²

COLONIAL

Scientific

Individualism

Human beings are most important in the world

Land and natural resources should be used for benefit of humans

Time is linearly structured and future orientated

INDIGENOUS

Spiritual—
can be many truths

Relatedness—
Society operates as a circle

Human beings are not the most important in the world

Land is sacred

Time is non-linear, cyclical in nature



Healthcare does not feel safe to many Indigenous people.¹

What is Implicit/Unconscious Bias?

- The attitudes or stereotypes that affect a person’s understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner—can be in direct contradiction to a person’s conscious beliefs and values
- Due to cultural conditioning— can seep into a person’s affect or behavior outside of the full awareness of that person
- Applies to race (racialization)—if raised in the West, reinforces the idea (consciously/not) that white > non-white

Racialization

- The image of the ‘drunk Indian’ is one of the most enduring colonizing images pervading Canadian public perceptions³
- Continues to have devastating consequences — there are multiple stories of Indigenous people being mistakenly assumed to be drunk when they were having a stroke or in shock

The evidence indicates that healthcare professionals exhibit the same levels of implicit bias as the wider population.⁴

Even if we endorse egalitarian values and consciously do not believe racist ideology is true, *we are all likely to have internalized some of it.*



Activators of Implicit Bias⁵



Fatigue



Time Constraints



Information Overload

Emergency Department
Overcrowding



Patients SENSE our implicit bias even if we are not aware of it.

What is Trauma?

The substance abuse and mental health services administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as events or circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening, which result in adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and well-being.

Roots of Indigenous Trauma = Colonialism

Loss of Culture

60s Scoop

Relocation

Indian
Hospitals

Denigration

Objects of Research
(without consent)

Legal Discrimination,
Heavy use of incarceration

Residential

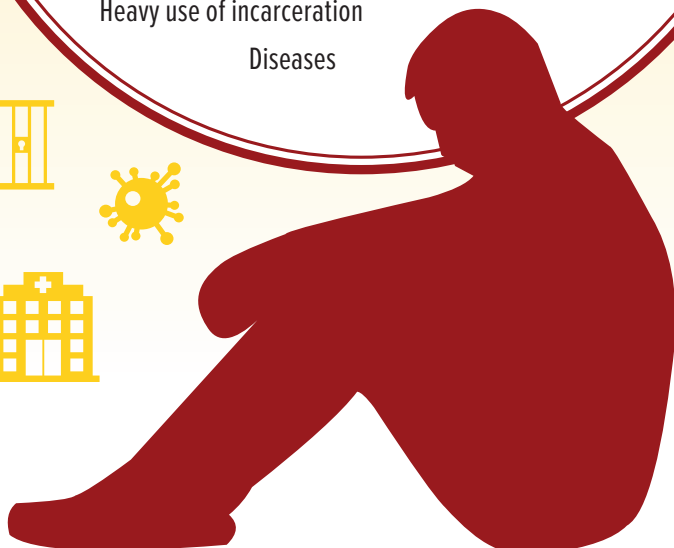
Diseases

Individuals who experience trauma may have an altered perception of world/experiences/safety.⁶



What is Trauma Informed Care?

Trauma informed care prioritizes the need to create an emotionally safe environment based on an understanding of the root causes, symptoms, and health effects of trauma.



Trauma Informed Care for Indigenous People = Decolonized Care

- Be aware of your own cultural values
- Belief in the superiority of Western Medicine
- Know your organizational culture of where you work
- Attitudes towards time
- Expectations of dress and behavior

TRY THIS

- Assume you have implicit bias
- Know that if you are busy or stressed, you are more likely to make decisions unconsciously

Reflect

Reconfigure

- Dismantle power dynamics
- Meaningful inclusion of Indigenous leadership
- Build a system of health care in which Indigenous voices are integral to the decision-making processes in both healthcare delivery and governance structures
- Institutional recognition of Indigenous ways of being and knowing and approaches to deliberation in the healthcare setting

TRY THIS

- Have Elders on boards, available to patients
- Be open to ideas that may not be familiar to you, based on your training

HOW CAN WE DECOLONIZE HEALTHCARE?

Recognize

Relationship

- Recognize the value of Indigenous healing practices
- To counter the stereotypes in your head, learn about the culture through the eyes and words of people within that culture

TRY THIS

- Read books by Indigenous authors
- Speak with Elders
- Ask people about their spirituality and cultural practices, how their practices enhance their life

- Relational Approach: Building good and right relationships reverses the colonial structures that convince us that one of us is better than the other
- “Decolonizing medicine begins with the project of rehumanization and reconnection, linking scans to people’s faces; patients to their families, their cosmologies, communities, and histories; peoples to their lands and mountains and waters; and relatives to one another across the vast web of life.”⁷

TRY THIS

- Take time for introductions. Share who you are and where you come from (your family’s cultural and geographical background before coming to North America)



References:

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4. FitzGerald, C., & Hurst, S. (2017). Implicit bias in healthcare professionals: a systematic review. BMC Medical Ethics, 18(1). doi: 10.1186/s12910-017-0179-8
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6. Van der Kolk, Bessel A. (2014). The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma. London: Allen Lane.
7. Marya R, Patel R. (2021). Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice. First ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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