Indigenous peoples health: supporting the root causes of wellness through primary care transformation

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First Nations Health Authority – Mental Health and Wellness Summit

May 24th, 2019
Starting in a good way ...
I started thinking about the intersection of Indigenous wellness and primary care almost 20 years ago.
Over the last twenty years I have come to believe that:
Being healthy and well means being in harmony and balance in mind, body and spirit and with all of our relations.
Humility, gratitude, respect, ceremony, land, language and food are good medicines.
Self-determination is the key determinant of health.
Structural and systemic Canadian colonial practices and policies undermine and interfere with our ability to be healthy, vibrant and self-determining.
The current renewal that is underway in B.C.’s primary care system is a tremendous opportunity to promote healthy, vibrant, self-determining Indigenous individuals, families and communities by:

- Status Quo
- Indigenous wellness
- Root causes
- Two-eyed seeing models

Healthy, vibrant, self-determining
My lens on Indigenous wellness and primary care has been shaped by many key events:

- Primary care training
- Indigenous healing
- Sickness and disability
- Functional medicine healing
- Public health
"My primary care training embodied the harms of the status quo: Indigenous healing, sickness and disability, functional medicine healing, public health, primary care training. Medicine and health always sees itself as benevolent and caring for people. It's not true for many Indigenous people, it's a violent encounter."

Dr. Barry Lavallee

Ignored to death: Brian Sinclair's death caused by racism, inquest inadequate, group says

Brian Sinclair, 45, was found dead in Health Sciences Centre ER 34 hours after arriving without being treated

Aidan Geary • CBC News • Posted: Sep 18, 2017 9:53 PM CT | Last Updated: September 19, 2017

Indigenous medicine and healers taught me about Indigenous healing beliefs and systems.

Being healthy and well means being in harmony and balance in mind, body and spirit and with all of our relations.

Humility, gratitude, respect, ceremony, land, language and food are good medicines.
Indigenous healers and medicines taught me that “Our lives are in the land” ...
Indigenous healers and medicines taught me that “Our lives are in the land” ...

“The plants are teachers. They are connected to each other, and all other spiritual beings through the sacredness of life. When I remember who I am – a human being connected to all of life – I remember also that I am loved by the spirit world and our ancestors. And when I remember this, I remember to respect even the smallest of things.”

Christi Belcourt, 2018.
Getting sick and being disabled forced me to create a “new circle of medicine” for myself:
Functional medicine is a model of primary care that can support two-eyed seeing.

Functional medicine is a model of primary care that aligns with Indigenous beliefs of health and wellness.
Functional medicine requires practitioners to “gather oneself” and engage in self-reflection.
Functional medicine honors people’s stories and helps them make meaning of their health journey.
Functional medicine holds space for strengths and illuminates barriers to wellness.
The functional medicine model illuminates the need to move WAY up stream.
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**Public health**
- Primary care training
- Indigenous healing
- Functional medicine healing
- Sickness and disability

Norval Morrisseau (Anishinaabe 1931-2007)
Children with Tree of Life
acrylic on canvas
The functional medicine model illuminates the need to move WAY up stream.
In order to promote Indigenous wellness through primary care transformation we must arrest racism, white supremacy and social exclusion.

“White fragility continues to hold racism in place.”
White Fragility

“Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and entitlement.” Di’Angelo.
Socially constructed race affects our proximal determinants of health such as:

• Whether we survive birth
• Which careers we will have
• Where we are most likely to live
• How much money we will earn
• Schools we will attend
• How healthy we will be
• Who our friends and partners will be
• How long we can expect to live
In order to promote Indigenous wellness, we must arrest racism, white supremacy and social exclusion.
The current renewal that is underway in B.C.’s primary care system is a tremendous opportunity to promote healthy, vibrant, self-determining Indigenous individuals, families and communities by:

- Status Quo
- Two-eyed seeing models
- Healthy, vibrant, self-determining
- Indigenous wellness
- Root causes

The diagram illustrates various factors impacting Indigenous health, such as cultural, historical, and community influences, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to improve wellness and self-determination.
In the next two weeks I commit to circular learning about ...