

The Benefits of Indigenous Cultural Safety Training

The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) administers the Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety (ICS) Program, with the goal of improving Indigenous health-care experiences and outcomes by increasing respect and understanding of the unique history and current realities of Indigenous populations. Core online training for health and social services professionals is one of many ways the Ontario ICS Program advances its mission. Since 2015, approximately 13,000 health professionals have taken the core training program. We talked with Diane Smylie, Provincial Director, Ontario ICS Program, about the benefits of Indigenous cultural safety training for physicians.

Why take cultural safety training?

The learning objective of the core courses is to help health professionals do their own self-reflection on how their culture, education, and history have contributed to internalized narratives about Indigenous people that results in unconscious biases and stereotyping.

Why is this important in a health-care context?

A physician's bias can lead to a delay in treatment, misdiagnosis, denial of treatment, or even death. This can even happen with good practitioners. For example, one of the biggest stereotypes is that all Indigenous people are alcohol and drug dependent. A physician who holds this bias may assume that an Indigenous patient's presenting symptoms are connected to alcohol withdrawal or intoxication. As a result the physician may misdiagnose the patient and appropriate treatment is delayed or denied. We hear about this type of situation a lot.

As a result of these types of experiences, many Indigenous people have developed a lack of trust in practitioners and may avoid or delay going to see them for a health issue.

The Ontario ICS Program offers a core course in health and mental health.

Which course would you recommend to residents?

It depends on the physician's specialty. For most residents, the core health course would be appropriate. However, if you are in psychiatry, you might want to start with the mental health course. Many of the same topics are addressed in both courses.



Ontario
Indigenous
Cultural Safety
Program

*An interview with Diane
Smylie, Provincial Director,
Ontario ICS Program*

What topics are addressed?

Topics include:

- Diversity of Indigenous peoples in Ontario
- The impact of colonization on current Indigenous health
- The significance of health disparities and the role of self-awareness in cultural safety
- Racial discrimination
- Stereotypes of Indigenous people in the media



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What is a course learning that may be surprising to participants?

Participants are often surprised that the training is more about them than it is about Indigenous people. They realize they aren't as aware as they may have believed initially. The hope is that participants gain knowledge and awareness. Also participants learn they are on a long journey. This is not a box that they tick.

One of the learning outcomes is to develop strategies to build collaborative relationships with Indigenous patients/clients. How so?

The knowledge helps participants avoid assumptions. Physicians start to create an open dialogue with Indigenous patients, exploring what is important to the patients. Physicians who have taken the core course report better relationship building with Indigenous patients.

COURSE DETAILS

Format: Online. Includes: videos, reading materials, activities, and facilitated interactive discussion between peers and the facilitator.

Facilitation: SOAHAC developed the training modules, modeled after the San'yas online training, an Indigenous Health program at the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) in British Columbia.

Training: 8-11 hours (Complete at your own pace over eight weeks).

Accreditation: Certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada for up to 16 Mainpro+ credits and eligible for up to 8 section 3 credits as defined by the Maintenance of Certification Program of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

Registration:

<http://soahac.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Core-Training-Course-Descriptions-CH-edits.pdf>

Additional Information about the Indigenous Cultural Safety Program: <http://soahac.on.ca/ics-training>

How Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Is Positively Affecting Health Service Delivery at Middlesex-London Health Unit

Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Middlesex-London Health Unit, took Indigenous cultural safety training from San'yas in October 2014, ahead of the official launch of the Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Program (administered through the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre). He shared with us the changes he and his staff have made at Middlesex-London Health Unit following the training.

What motivated you take the training?

A desire to improve service to Indigenous clients. There was a recognition that services need to take into consideration the unique history of the Indigenous people and communities. Their history is so different from the history of the settlers.

What was your most important takeaway?

There is much more to be done into terms of reconciliation. The training motivated me to get all of my staff trained. But knowledge is just the start. We need an attitude change, policy change, and sharing of power.

Have you and your staff changed the way you approach caring for Indigenous patients?

In terms of my work, the question I ask myself is "How can I share power?" I'm trying to figure out how to partner with Indigenous leaders to do this. I've reached out to a



An interview with Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Middlesex-London Health Unit

local band chief and his staff. The colonial attitude and power structure is not healthy for anyone.

For my staff, they must also understand the power dynamic and try to break it down. If a clinician is sitting in an office and thinking, "What I say goes," it won't result in a positive outcome. We know compliance rates for prescribed medication are approximately 40%. At the end of the day, patients are the decision makers. They will decide if they have the surgery or they take the medication.

Also, our organization is on a journey. We were the first public health unit to adopt Jordan's Principle. We are looking at our hiring practices, and hosting days with Indigenous speakers who can share their experience of health care with staff.

Do you think these adjustments have enhanced the care you are providing at Middlesex London Health Unit?

Yes, although we don't have good ways of measuring the progress yet.

Would you recommend medical residents take cultural safety training?

Yes. If we don't have the training to understand the unique challenges of the Indigenous people, then we are not on the journey. Our best intentions won't make a difference. I've spent my whole career working with Indigenous people. I thought I understood the issues, but I knew much less than I thought. No matter what you think you know about Indigenous issues, you need this course.

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle ensuring First Nations children can access public services on the same terms as other children. It was named for Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Manitoba, who died in hospital and never spent a day in the family home because of jurisdictional disputes over who would pay costs for in-home care.

Physician Job Opportunities to Support Indigenous Populations



Enjoy a rewarding and exciting career working with and in Indigenous communities across Ontario. Physicians have the opportunity to hone their generalist skills while working alongside experienced physicians who are available to provide support and mentorship. Additionally, physicians practising in rural and remote areas have increasing opportunities to teach and continue academic pursuits.

Take a look at some of the opportunities available for both locum and permanent positions where you can make a difference.

Sioux Lookout and Area: Where Passion Meets Opportunity

The Sioux Lookout region is currently recruiting full-time, part-time, and locum family physicians to work in a variety of settings that may include clinic, ED, and hospitalist coverage. With a catchment area of more than 32,000, you will help to provide care to 31 remote First Nation communities. Supported by the 60-bed Meno Ya Win Health Centre, physicians have access to a collegial network of formal and informal mentorship. Flexible and lucrative contracts are available.

For more information, please contact Jamie Sitar at j.sitar@healthforceontario.ca



Weeneebayko Area Health Authority (WAHA): Committed to Excellent Health Care

WAHA is actively seeking dedicated and committed physicians for short-term and long-term positions. WAHA takes great pride in being the primary service and care provider for six communities that include the Cree people of the James / Hudson Bay lowlands. As part of the medical team, you would provide service in the family medicine clinic, coverage in the ED, in-patient care, and support medical services to coastal health and nursing stations.

For more information, please contact Jamie Sitar at j.sitar@healthforceontario.ca

For other opportunities, contact practiceontario@healthforceontario.ca and visit HFOJobs.ca

Available in accessible format upon request: www.healthforceontario.ca/acs