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The Miyazaki Clinic¹ – A New Model of Indigenous-Centred Culturally Safe Health Care

Issue: The urgent crisis in Indigenous health care

There is an urgent, yet enduring, crisis of Indigenous health care in Canada. While impacted by the broader challenges facing Canada's health care system, the crisis in Indigenous health care is distinct. One of the legacies of colonization has been the perpetuation of particular barriers to Indigenous peoples accessing and receiving sufficient, appropriate, and culturally safe health care. These barriers include racist stereotypes that directly contribute to lesser, or even denial, of service, misdiagnosis, higher rates of illness, and even death. These negative outcomes occur at a vastly disproportional rate to other populations.

The existence of the crisis in Indigenous health care is not anecdotal. The recent study *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care* involved a comprehensive analysis of healthcare data and engaged with over 9000 individuals (including thousands of Indigenous peoples and health care workers). *In Plain Sight* concluded that the crisis of Indigenous health care was a systemic problem that requires a multi-faceted, holistic, and transformative response, and described some of the experience of Indigenous people receiving health care in the following terms:

Problems for Indigenous people in the medical system include: Unacceptable personal interactions, long wait times/denial of service, lack of communication or shunning, not believing/minimizing concerns, inappropriate or no pain management, rough treatment, medical mistakes, and lack of recognition/respect regarding cultural protocols. (p.22)

Efforts to address this crisis have been ongoing for many years. Work is taking place structurally (such as through the creation of the First Nations Health Authority in B.C.), in policy and law (such as through adoption of standards around UNDRIP and the Anti-Racism Data Act), in service delivery, and in approaches to education and training. Many of these efforts – while necessary and important – will only make major impacts over the long-term.

There remains the immediate and desperate need for culturally safe and Indigenous-specific health care services that can be accessed on the ground, in communities.

¹ The name "Miyazaki Clinic" honours a particular story of sacrifice and reciprocity to help survival and better health outcomes. Dr. Miyazaki and his family were prisoners in internment camps in the interior of British Columbia during WWII. The St'at'imc would smuggle food into the internment camps to help those imprisoned survive. After the camps were closed, Dr. Miyazaki dedicated his life to serving the health and well-being of the St'at'imc and other Indigenous peoples, providing health services in many forms. This example of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples helping each other with dignity, respect, and care holds a lesson for all of us about how we must relate with love, empathy, and concern.

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Solution: The Miyazaki Clinic - A Model of Adaptable, Responsive, Culturally-Safe Community Medical Clinics for Indigenous Peoples

Mitigating the immediate crisis requires accessible, community-based, culturally-safe, health care services. Such a space has been described in the following terms:

culturally safe environment can only be defined by the Indigenous person receiving care and does not profile or discriminate against the person but is experienced as respectful, safe and allows meaningful communication and service. It is a physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually safe environment, without challenge, ignorance or denial of an individual's identity. To be culturally safe requires positive anti-racism stances, tools and approaches and the continuous practice of cultural humility. (*In Plain Sight, pg 11*).

The Miyazaki Clinic is a model for such a space – designed to provide an in-community, culturally-appropriate space, that can be adapted to reflect the particular priorities, needs, and approaches already being taken by communities to address the health care crisis.

The Miyazaki Clinic model has the following elements:

- An eco-friendly cedar longhouse structure;
- The design, in partnership with community, of the art and messaging within the space;
- An interior design that supports dignity and privacy in provision of services, including multiple/separate entrances and soundproof rooms;
- Special venting to support spiritual/ceremonial practices (eg. smudging);
- A design for culturally-safe, patient-centered care that has been developed based on extensive interviews and research with Indigenous patients and health care-workers.

In addition to a culturally safe space for delivery of health-care services, the Miyazaki clinic provides a resource team of experts in Indigenous health care to collaborate and work with Indigenous communities, as well as hospitals, in the design and staffing of service-delivery within the clinic. The resource team includes Indigenous experts, physicians and health care workers, advocates, patient voices, and legal and regulatory advisors. The resource team, in supporting the establishment of a clinic, will offer ideas and options for service delivery and staffing, and best practices for cultural safety and patient-centred practice. The resource team can also help Indigenous communities and hospitals determine how the clinic can fit with existing practices and programs for Indigenous health-care, and help support transition to a clinic model.

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Get More Information and Get Involved

The Miyazaki Clinic has been launched by Golden Eagle Rising Society (<https://www.goldeneaglerising.org>) and Spirit Works Limited (<https://www.spiritworks.ca>)

We hope you will get involved in advancing the Miyazaki Clinic and helping to address the urgent crisis in Indigenous health care. There are multiple ways to get involved including donating your time and expertise, providing financial support for a clinic in particular communities, or providing other forms of support.

We are happy to provide you with more information and details.
Contact Shain Jackson at 604-727-0018 or shain@spiritworks.ca.