

September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

On this National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as we reflect upon the brutal colonial history of our country and its permanent damaging effects on our Indigenous neighbours, each of us should pause to ask ourselves how we can contribute to reconciliation. Justice Murray Sinclair noted that reconciliation is hard and that it will be a long slow process. He said “But if we make a concerted effort ... then eventually we will be able, some day, to wake up and, to our surprise, find that we are treating each other in a way that was intended when contact was first made.”

This week, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the pediatricians of the Northern and Indigenous Child Health Program who are working very hard at reconciliation, providing culturally safe medical care to children and families from Quebec’s Northern and Indigenous communities. The team includes:

Director: Dr. Chi-Minh (Chip) Phi also serving communities in Region 18

Dr. Aisling O’Gorman – Region 18

Dr. Julie Nadeau-Lessard – Region 18

Dr. El Domiati (Associate) Region 18

Dr. Johanne Morel – Region 17

Dr. Margaret Berry – Region 17

Dr. Jessica Monteiro – Region 17

Dr. Hema Patel – Region 17 (part time, including community visits)

Dr. Geoff Dougherty – Montreal based work

The nurses affiliated with the program include:

Elisa Spadafora – Ullivik for Region 17 - Inuit patients

Jovanka Dorsainvil – Region 18 – Cree patients

The social workers affiliated with the program include:

Leigh Garland - Region 17

Camille Paré-Roy - Region 18

The interpreters affiliated with the program include:

Delores Coonishish – Cree

Eva Saganash – Cree

Jeannie Qaunirq – Inuktitut

The administrative team providing support includes:

Gina Paulini, Admin for Ullivik – Region 17

Isabelle Nepton, Admin for Cree Patient Services – Region 18

Josée Belhumeur, Admin for the MCH Northern Program

The Northern and Indigenous Child Health Program has existed for over 40 years, evolving over time. Today, the program serves over 2000 children and youth per year in 14 communities in Nunavik and 9 communities in Eeyou Istchee (James Bay) – many with complex conditions. In addition to daily support

and on call services from Montreal, care coordination for children requiring evaluations at MCH, and teaching and advocacy for these vulnerable children and their families, the pediatricians who are part of this team each spend an average of 10-12 weeks per year visiting the communities. The commitment shown by these physicians to addressing critical healthcare needs, in very challenging conditions, is remarkable. When they are visiting the communities, they work long days, caring for children with difficult problems in settings with few resources. Try to imagine getting through your day without internet access! This is a common reality for this group. Remember also that they leave the comforts of their homes and families to pursue this important work.

During these visits, the members of the Northern and Indigenous Child Health Program bear witness to the lasting impacts of colonialism. The disparities between these communities and our own in the south extend far beyond the usual differences between urban and rural settings. Inadequate housing and a lack of clean drinking water are shockingly still common. Evidence of the intergenerational trauma of residential schools imbues healthcare encounters and too many aspects of daily life.

These pediatricians draw energy and inspiration from their work in remote communities to innovate. Dr. Johanne Morel developed and leads Minnie's Hope Social Pediatric Centre ([www.minnieshope.org](http://www.minnieshope.org)), a non-profit social pediatric centre that offers relationship-based comprehensive care that is aligned with traditional Cree and Inuit philosophies. This interdisciplinary program works to help the children and families of Whapmagoostui and Kuujuaaraapik reach their full potential. Dr. Aisling O'Gorman leads, in partnership with Tealey Normandin, the Indigenous Child and Youth Health Teaching Series, providing important CME to members of our department. The content of the Indigenous Child and Youth Health teaching series was developed by Dr. Kent Saylor with input from Dr. Morel (among many other Canadian pediatricians). Dr. O'Gorman updated the materials, adapted them to our local reality, and initiated the delivery of the series. These are only two examples of the excellent work by members of the Northern and Indigenous Child Health Program.

Next time you see one of these remarkable pediatricians, please thank them for the work they do. And perhaps ask their advice on how you may contribute to reconciliation. They have a great deal to teach us all.

Have a good weekend.

Beth Foster, MD, MSCE, FRCPC  
Professor of Pediatrics  
Chair, Dept. of Pediatrics McGill University  
Pediatrician-in-Chief, Montreal Children's Hospital of the MUHC  
Harvey Guyda Chair in Pediatrics