

November 11th , 2022

The McGill FMHS Haile T. Debas Prize “recognizes a faculty member who helps manifest the ideals of equity and anti-racism through practical action across a range of possible activities”. It will come as no surprise to many in the Dept. of Pediatrics that the 2022 Haile T. Debas Prize was awarded to our own Dr. Samir Shaheen-Hussain. Samir was recognized for his myriad efforts to expose, educate about, and ultimately eliminate harmful, colonial practices in the medical care of Indigenous children. While Samir has a long history of advocacy in support of marginalized groups, his work in this area began with his leadership of the 2018 #aHand2Hold campaign to end the traumatizing colonial practice of medical evacuations of Indigenous children without an adult accompanier. Not only was the campaign successful in ending this practice, but it culminated in his authoring a critically acclaimed book, “Fighting for a Hand to Hold: Confronting Medical Colonialism against Indigenous Children in Canada”. Dr. Shaheen-Hussain’s book has been widely endorsed by Indigenous communities and healthcare professionals, including Dr. Alika Lafontaine, the first Indigenous President of the Canadian Medical Association. The book has also won several awards and has become a must-read for Canadian healthcare professionals.

The success of the #aHand2Hold campaign and the book led Dr. Shaheen-Hussain to additional advocacy efforts in support of Indigenous communities. He was invited to testify as an expert witness at the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec, and at the coroner’s public inquiry into the death of Joyce Echaquan. He helped organize the “Justice for Joyce” vigils in the past two years to commemorate the anniversary of Joyce Echaquan’s death. Dr. Shaheen-Hussain is currently the pediatric consultant for the “Direction de soutien aux familles, Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones” of the Quebec government. Perhaps most importantly, Samir has developed meaningful personal relationships with many Indigenous people and communities, including Indigenous scholars and activists, through his work.

The Department of Pediatrics, McGill University, and the Montreal Children’s Hospital are richer as a result of Samir’s scholarship, advocacy, and tireless efforts to decolonize both healthcare and the academy. Please join me in congratulating Samir on this well-deserved award.

Enjoy the weekend.

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