

# Indigenous Practice in Maternity Care: Birthing in a Good Way

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# Opening in a Good Way

- Prayer & Smudge

## Indigenous Practice in Maternity Care: Birthing in a Good Way

- From a rights-based perspective- Understand the mechanisms for the meaningful Integration of Traditional Healing Practices in Western Healthcare
- Understanding the role of ceremonial fire with birth and how to better support families who wish to be able to hold one



# Disclosures

Stephanie Van Haute- I have none of the following COI's

- **Relationships with financial sponsors:**

- **Any direct financial relationships including receipt of honoraria:** PharmaCorp ABC, Canadian Cancer Org.
- **Memberships on advisory boards or speakers' bureau:** XYZ Biopharmaceuticals Ltd.
- **Patents for drugs or devices:** Widget ABC
- **Other: financial relationships/investments** Employee of XXY Hospital Group, consultant for Company X

# Who I am and where I come from



# BREATHE

## Visualization & Centering

- [Native American Flute | Birds | sounds nature - YouTube](#)



# Elements of traditional parenting

- In our traditional kinship systems, children were the at the center of the family system.
- Everything we did was with, and for, the children.
- Women had babies on their back, breasts, and hips while they were skinning and tanning hides, gathering water and wood, cooking, harvesting berries and medicine, and everything in between.
- Older children often stayed with the kokums and moshums to provide that much needed extra support for them.
- Children learned from our kinship systems. They learned from their mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, kokums, moshums, and older relatives. They learned from the Land by being fully integrated and immersed into most processes and practices.
- And the idea of children being seen as a disruption to daily living was non-existent.



## What are some other impacts of Colonization on parenting and families?

- Go grab a piece of paper and a pen
- Take the next 2 minutes to write them down without thinking too hard about what you are writing (stream of consciousness)





# Who Here Can Sing a Lullaby to Their Child in Their Language?

## Lullaby

- [Lakota Lullaby \(words and translation on screen\) - YouTube](#)



# Intergenerational Trauma- Blood Memory

*The cumulative emotional & psychological wounding across generations including the life span which emanates from massive group trauma*

- Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart



# Incorporating Ceremony

Integrating community and  
traditional healing & birthing  
practices at the bedside

A Rights-Based and Pragmatic  
Perspective



# Traditional Health and Healing- A Global Perspective

- Use of traditional medicines and healing is evidenced globally (Ijaz & Boon, 2018; Pham et al., 2020)
- Is alive and well- adapting to new technologies, leading to novel understandings of its use (Ijaz & Boon, 2018).
- Recent evidence suggests that as many as 70% of Indigenous people regularly integrate the use of tradition healing into their health practices (George et al., 2018). For those who do not currently access traditional healing, as much as 51% said that they would like to (George et al., 2018).
- Lack of knowledge around traditional medicine and ceremonies (George et al., 2018), rooted in colonial practices that banned their use (Robbins & Dewar, 2011), as well as costs of using a traditional healer (Pham et al., 2020) were cited amongst the most common reasons for Indigenous people not incorporating traditional healing into their health routines.
- Much of these issues could be alleviated through the incorporation of traditional therapies and healers within publicly funded and administered health systems.



# Indigenous Worldview of Health and Healing Practices- Turtle Island

- Indigenous self-determination over health and healing has been practiced by Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island since time immemorable (Gallagher, 2019)
- Indigenous Worldview of health and healing extends beyond treatment of disease (Bassett et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2022) and recognizes that physical symptoms or manifestations of illness are due to an imbalance of spiritual, emotional and psychological health (Broome & Broome, 2007; Robbins & Dewar, 2011).
- Indigenous healing practices focus on a return to balance of these four areas of life (Mundel & Chapman, 2010; Tanner et al., 2022), which can also be referred to as a person's own Medicine Wheel (Dapice, 2006; Rieger et al., 2021).



## What Do We Mean by “Ceremony”?

- Refers to cultural and health and healing practices which strengthen and support relationships which extend beyond the living to the spiritual realms inhabited by our ancestors (Broome & Broome, 2007; Robbins & Dewar, 2011).
- Ceremony is also used to balance our relationship with the non-living (Lavalley, 2009; Wilson, 2008).



# What Do We Mean by “Ceremony”?

## Examples of Ceremonial Practices:

- Smudging
- Sweatlodge
- Sundance
- Full Moon Ceremonies
- Yuwippee
- Sacred Fires



# Shared Agreements Necessary to Advance Meaningful Integration of Ceremonial Health Practices in Canada's Health Setting

- Western Medicine is not neutral, is not unbiased and has its own philosophy and Worldview (Robbins & Dewar, 2011)
- Western biomedicine is founded on Cartesian health practices/ logic (Ijaz & Boon, 2018)
- Funders including Provincial and Federal governments, require Indigenous Health leaders and providers to adapt Indigenous Health programs to a Western worldview of health and healing (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014; Walsh-Buhi, 2017)
- This is a form of colonization and perpetuates colonial relations and Western dominance





## Shared Agreements Necessary to Advance Meaningful Integration of Ceremonial Health Practices in Canada's Health Setting

*[W]e possess inherent rights to self-determination. These inherent rights were not endowed by any other state or Nation, but are passed on through birthright, are collective, and flow from the connection to the Creator and our lands. (Chiefs of Ontario, n.d.).*



# Shared Agreements Necessary to Advance Meaningful Integration of Ceremonial Health Practices in Canada's Health Setting

- Traditional health and healing holds the solution to redress the impacts of colonization, and in-fact, many have asserted that “our culture is medicine” (Bassett et al., 2012).
- This notion is supported by Canadian and International legislation (TRC, 2015; UNDRIP, 2007), recognizing the INHERENT RIGHT of Indigenous Peoples to access traditional healing practices while receiving care in provincially and federally funded health systems
- Therefore this is a RESPONSIBILITY of publicly funded health systems to fund and provide access to ceremony



## Moving Forward in A Good Way

- Incorporating traditional healing and ceremonies into Canada's Health system has largely remained within the confines of dominant-system approaches and understanding of health and healing (Drost, 2019), and is often used as integrative, or adjunct therapy alongside Western Methods (George et al., 2018; Ijaz & Boon, 2018).
- A wholistic healthcare system, guided by Indigenous knowledges is required to for Indigenous (and our collective) health and healing (Broome & Broome, 2007; Ijaz & Boon, 2018).
- This demands a paradigm shift



## Moving Forward in A Good Way

- The challenge for dominant-system health leaders, nurses, physicians and our funders-will be to support the integration of Indigenous healing meaningfully into Canada's health system without perpetuating colonial relations (Johnson-Jennings et al., 2018).
- This can be achieved through decolonizing practices which seek to interrupt, rather than perpetuate colonial relations (CAAN & ICAD, 2019; NYSHN, 2016).



## What Does Cultural Safety Have to do With it?

*Cultural safety is determined by ... individuals, families and communities.  
Cultural safe practice is ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practicing behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism*

*(Ahpra & National Boards, 2019, n.p.).*



## What Does Disrupting Anti-Indigenous Racism Have to do With it?

- Anti-Indigenous Racism is *ENDEMIC* to Canada's Health System: *In Plain Sight* (2020)
- Disrupting Racism is a Reflexive Practice
- Involves critical reflection of Unconscious Biases
- Integral to RECONCILIATION-- AKA: Integrating two disparate worldviews



# Sacred Fire and Birth

Integrating community and traditional healing & birthing practices at the bedside

What it means to do so in right-relation



# Sacred Fires During Childbirth- A Case Study and Reflection

## Scenario 1:

- Family request for sacred fire
- Family gathered wood, solicited fire keepers
- Gathered during anticipated difficult birth in ceremony and in prayer

### **System provided:**

Safe space and fire pit

Clearance with Fire Marshall

Alerted surrounding residences and communities

## Scenario 2:

- Family request for sacred fire

### **System provided:**

Wood

Firekeepers

Safe space and fire pit

Clearance with Fire Marshall

Alerted surrounding residences and communities





## Sacred Fires During Childbirth- A Case Study and Reflection

- Community as medicine- what are some important differences between the two scenarios?
- How might scenario 2 actually be perpetuating colonial relations?
- How could this be improved with standard operating procedures which support a variety of family situations?



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