

October 25, 2016

## RVH Patient Navigator wins Minister's Medal

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre's (RVH) Leah Bergstrom was honoured with a very prestigious medal from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Bergstrom is the Aboriginal Patient Navigator with the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program and was awarded the Individual Champion Medal from Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins at a recent ceremony.

The Minister's Medals to Honour Excellence in Health Quality and Safety is a competitive, annual recognition program celebrating the collaborative efforts of Ontario's health care providers in improving care for Ontarians. The Individual Champion Medal is awarded to one individual who has demonstrated leadership in focusing on quality.

"This is a huge honour for Leah and a testament to her exceptional work which focuses on the cultural and spiritual needs of patients and their families," says Nancy Savage, executive vice president Patient & Family Experience and regional vice president, Cancer Care Ontario. "She works together with North Simcoe Muskoka First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities, and with non-Aboriginal partners for the betterment of her patients co-ordinating access not only to cancer services, but to all the basic needs that patients require such as food, shelter, education and other health care services."

Aboriginal Patient Navigation services have been offered to patients and family members of the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program since fall 2013 as part of the cancer program's commitment to Cancer Care Ontario's (CCO) Aboriginal Cancer Strategy.

"Aboriginal Patient Navigators play a critical role in furthering our partnership goals of working together to improve the cancer system in a way that honours the Aboriginal Path of Well-being," says Michael Sherar, president and CEO, CCO. "This is a tremendous achievement and I want to thank Leah for her commitment to supporting First Nations, Inuit and Métis cancer patients and their families."

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Dr. Eric Hoskins remarked, "Ms. Bergstrom's leadership is an excellent example of the incredible impact that Ontario's health care professionals can have on improving the quality of patients' lives. She demonstrates how Ontario's health care professionals continue to use innovation, collaboration and compassion to continually improve the care they provide to their patients."

Some populations are at greater risk for developing cancer and suffer poorer outcomes than others. First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are among those populations. However, social and economic inequality and lack of trust in a system that has historically failed them and geographical barriers are preventing First Nation people suffering with cancer from accessing the healthcare they need. According to recent census data, 4.3 per cent of North Simcoe Muskoka residents, or roughly 20,450 people, identify as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI), which is the third highest proportion among Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration Networks.

Leah Bergstrom shares her views on her role. "As Aboriginal Patient Navigator, I work to create a space within the cancer program that is culturally safe and supportive of the unique cultural and spiritual needs of the patient. For the Aboriginal community to heal from the effects of oppressive historical government policy, a trauma-informed approach to care is essential. I view every interaction with the Aboriginal community and each patient as an opportunity to support the broader healing process. It truly is an honour to be acknowledged for this important work that is moving health care into alignment with the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

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