

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

Minding the Gap

If you have ever travelled on public transit in the United Kingdom you may have been struck by the amount of signage in railway stations constantly reminding commuters to “mind the gap”. The gap referred to is the space between the train and the platform. This gap could be dangerous and rail riders, especially ones from other countries, needed the reminder to be watchful lest they slip painfully into the void.

This call to “mind the gap” has stuck with me all these years. I think of it whenever health care professionals draw attention to the various gaps in service that exist. We are mindful of these gaps and seek to find ways to ensure that people and communities are well cared for.

The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced numerous gaps in health care systems. One such gap noted over the past few years was the need to actively tend to the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of patients, families and staff. The pandemic was an existential threat that made people afraid and anxious. In some care settings people fell into a gap of despair as they were unable to be physically present with their loved ones who were receiving care. Health care professionals too were concerned for their own safety and that of their loved ones.

In response to this gap individuals and groups on local, provincial, national and international levels moved to find ways to help prevent people falling into the various gaps that can harm our hearts. They developed programs, learning modules and virtual gatherings to tend to what was going on in people.



Mutual support was noted as an integral piece to navigating those tough times. More and more emphasis was placed on self care and being mindful of practices that maintain wellness and promote resiliency.

As an organization it's important to ask what things we can do to help protect our patients and teams from falling into the various gaps that affect our wellbeing. Do we recognize and address the emotional gaps that exist for those nearing the end of life, or for those in assisted living or in community? Are we mindful of the gaps for “behind the scenes” staff and those in middle and upper leadership? It is true that some unique initiatives have been developed and gotten underway over the past years. [Schwartz Rounds](#), the Self Care Café (Instagram: [teamselfcarecafe](#)) and other initiatives strive to ensure that the

Self-care is not
self-indulgence it is
self-preservation.

Audre Lorde

gaps in our hearts are tended to. They were created to help staff find meaning, purpose and wellbeing as they work.

Minding the gap of spiritual distress is the daily work of Island Health's Spiritual Health Practitioners. Every day they tend to the gaps of fear, anxiety and distress that patients, residents, family members and staff have fallen into. They show up when people have tripped into voids of despair, existential distress and disillusionment. They come to offer a hand and a listening ear to help find a way up for those who have slipped. They accompany them hoping to help find a surer footing so that they can continue their journey with strength and hope.

As individuals too it is helpful to remember to "mind the gap". To think of where in our own lives the tricky steps are that can swallow us up and cause us harm. Minding the gap means we remember the activities and practices that keep our selves safe for the journey ahead. What does being mindful of the gaps that challenge your spiritual wellbeing look like for you? What sorts of situations cause you to falter? Where do you need to step so that your life is strengthened and given hope?

I wonder if Londoners even notice the "mind the gap" signs any more. So adept are they in their travel, so mindful of the gaps that can trip them up, that they no longer need reminding. Perhaps that's the goal. To be so mindful of the spaces that can swallow us up that we don't need the reminder. We can just go.

Spiritual Health Practitioner UPDATE



Paul Truman will transition to a fulltime Spiritual Health Practitioner position at the Cowichan District Hospital beginning April 3.



Lydia Collin will transition from the WCGH to a new Spiritual Health Practitioner role at NRGH which supports patients, families and staff in the ICU, HAU and ED. Lydia begins her new role on April 10.

Until then, blessings to each of us as we mind the gaps in our work and in our own lives. As we work with eyes wide open aware of what we and our teams need in order to not just be but to thrive in doing the challenging and amazing work that we as health care professionals are privileged to do.

MAiD Bereavement Support – Expanded Sessions

Oceanna Hall, Spiritual Health Practitioner at the Saanich Peninsula Hospital, offers virtual bereavement support sessions for friends and family of MAiD recipients. Sessions, via Zoom, are every 2nd and 4th Thursday from 1:30-2:30pm and 7:00-8:00pm. For more info visit the [Spiritual Health Intranet](#) page or contact Oceanna at Oceanna.hall@islandhealth.ca

Watch your Step

With eyes and heart wide open
may you be fully aware
of the sacred
journey of your life.

Watch each step my friend
and mind the gaps
that can trip you up.

Place your feet and heart
on sure footings
so that you stand firm
and travel far.

Mind the gaps
that pull you down
that sap your life
that cause you ache.

Watch your step my friend
for your life
and your work
are precious.

NUMA (Greek for "spirit/breath") is produced by Island Health's Spiritual Health team to draw awareness to issues of spirituality in health care. The editor of numa is Darren Colyn, Spiritual Health Leader. To read past issues of NUMA go to the [Spiritual Health public webpage](#).

Island Health's Spiritual Health team members acknowledge, with humility and gratitude, that we live and practice on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw people. We commit ourselves to ongoing learning as we work towards reconciliation and strive to ensure that the spiritual beliefs and practices of all people are supported for their individual and collective wellbeing.