

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

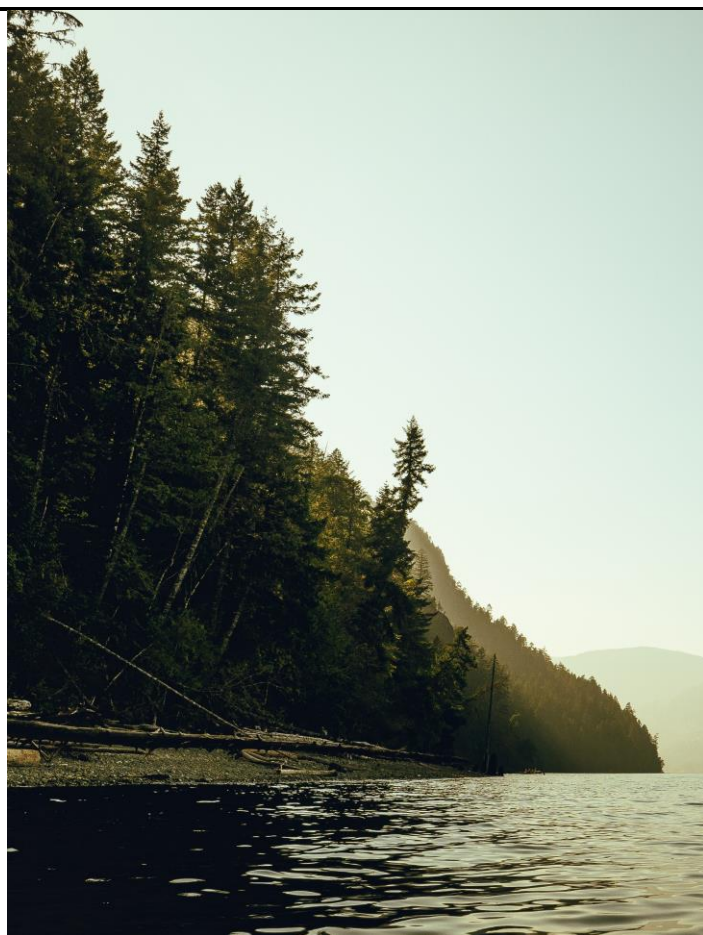
Nurturing the Spirit

There are many words that describe the work that health professionals do each day. They assess, diagnose, treat, scan, operate, resuscitate, intubate, extubate, prescribe, mobilize, discharge and palliate (just to name a few!) For Spiritual Health Practitioners (SHP) one all encompassing term for the work that they do is that they *nurture*. Perhaps we do not often think of this word as a common action for health care professionals but it really is at the heart of the care that SHPs provide each day. For this reason, the theme for Spiritual Health Week 2023 (October 22 – 28) is *Nurturing the Spirit: The role of Island Health's Spiritual Health Practitioners*.

The verb *nurture* is defined as "to care for and encourage the growth or development of". "Caring for" and "encouraging the growth and development of" are two streams of nurturing care that SHPs provide to patients, their loved ones and staff in our system.

"In the middle of difficulty,
lies opportunity."

Albert Einstein



On the one hand, SHPs nurture the spirit by simply caring for people who are going through some of the most difficult times of their lives. This nurturing care is often shown by providing a compassionate, non-judgemental listening ear to someone who is experiencing emotional pain or loss. It is about bearing witness to the experience of another; normalizing feelings that surface due to what they are experiencing. In this way, SHP support around a paediatric death or staff member who has experienced a critical incident is not a time

for spiritual exploration – but rather a time for being present and holding space. Such nurturing care works to gently hold and validate the person through what they are experiencing.

On the other hand, SHPs also nurture the spirit by encouraging the growth and development of those in their care. SHPs understand that sometimes experiences of ill health, trauma and various other difficult experiences contain within them an opportunity for an individual to grow and develop. As Einstein said, “In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity”.

To be clear, SHPs, in their everyday practice, do not go around forcing or manufacturing growth and development in every consult. However, they do recognize that, in many situations, such exploration is precisely what the individual is searching for. The palliative patient terrified of dying is supported by the SHP to explore his beliefs in order to come to a more peaceful posture towards his death. The staff member, who through the support of the SHP, begins to explore her cultural spiritual practices, as a way to cope with workplace challenges, is another example of this nurturing work.

SHPs recognize that momentous life shifts, relational reparations and transformations of character and outlook can occur when individuals are well supported through challenging times. With a keen and nurturing eye SHPs know precisely how to support individuals towards such healing and nurturing of spirit.

Across the island, health care teams provide excellent health care everyday and the nurturing of the spirit, provided by Island Health’s SHPs, is a very important part of that excellence in care. Health care consultations can often be more than assessment, treatment and discharge - they can also be precious opportunities where individuals grow, develop and find healing not only in their body – but in their spirit as well.

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



SPIRITUAL HEALTH WEEK

October 22-28, 2023

NURTURING THE SPIRIT:

The Role of Island Health’s Spiritual Health Practitioners



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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](#).