



(+ video) Two Indigenous doctors who are decolonizing their academy receive the Royal College's 2017 Indigenous health award

June 21, 2017, OTTAWA — Two Indigenous doctors and Royal College Fellows — Dr. Lisa Richardson, an Anishinaabe internist, and Dr. Jason Pennington, a Huron-Wendat surgeon — have won the Royal College's 2017 Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award for their ongoing work to decolonize the academy at the University of Toronto (U of T)'s medical school.

Watch our short tribute video here: <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/xs2ev>

In 2014, Dr. Richardson and Dr. Pennington cofounded the Office of Indigenous Medical Education, a culturally safe space in U of T's Faculty of Medicine where Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can access traditional teachings.

Together, they are increasing Indigenous student admissions, building a strong curriculum in Indigenous health, and nurturing a vibrant and resilient cohort of Canadian Indigenous physicians.

"Dr. Richardson and Dr. Pennington's powerful advocacy is enabling their medical school to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action," said Royal College CEO Dr. Andrew Padmos. "Instituting transformational change of this kind in an established academic institution is not easy. Their commitment, perseverance and devotion characterize the spirit of this award."

A community-based curriculum that's more than just clinical

When Dr. Pennington attended U of T's medical school twenty years ago, there was only one lecture on Indigenous health in the whole four years of the curriculum. He also remembers one year where he was the only identified Indigenous student.

In the last five years, he and Dr. Richardson have been advocating passionately to change this. They have collaborated with colleagues to increase the representation of both Indigenous students in the medical school and Indigenous health concepts in the curriculum.

Their hard work is paying off. They formalized an Indigenous Student Application Pathway, a special parallel pathway for Indigenous students to apply for admission. Thanks to this initiative, the medical school now has Indigenous students in each year of the four-year program.

The pair has also developed a new curriculum that sends Indigenous and non-Indigenous medical students out into the community to learn what it's like to be an Indigenous person in the urban setting of Toronto. Students meet with healers,

attend powwows, participate in drumming circles and attend sweats at Indigenous health access centres.

Through the people they meet, the medical students see the impacts of residential schools and racism on the health inequities faced by Indigenous Peoples. They come away with a very deep understanding of colonization and its impacts, and what their role should be as a health provider for Indigenous patients.

The wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples is a top priority for the Royal College

The Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award was established in 2014 to recognize physicians such as Dr. Richardson and Dr. Pennington who epitomize a zeal and devotion to the pursuit of rights and justice for Canada's Indigenous Peoples.

"It's really quite an honour and very important to have been even nominated, but to win this award. We also love that the Royal College allowed us to receive it together," said Dr. Pennington and Dr. Richardson. "Indigenous Peoples in Canada still suffer from astonishing health inequities and disparities — we still have so much work to do to close that gap."

For more information about our awards and grants program, visit the Royal College website at www.royalcollege.ca/awards.

About the Royal College

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is the home of specialty medicine in Canada, setting the standards for postgraduate medical education, supporting the continuing professional development of almost 50,000 Fellows and affiliates, and supporting health system innovations nationwide. To find out more, please visit royalcollege.ca.

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