

June 21, 2016, OTTAWA — Sagamok Anishnawbek (Ojibwa) surgeon, Dr. Nadine Caron, MPH, FRCSC, has been providing surgical care to the people of rural and northern B.C. for more than a decade. However, it is her distinction as a role model and her success in co-creating a Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health that has led her to receive the Royal College's 2016 Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award.

Watch our short tribute video here: <https://youtu.be/M41eiGhiwbg>

### **An exceptional role model for Indigenous women and girls**

Dr. Caron is a general and endocrine surgeon in Prince George, B.C., and teaches as an associate professor in the Northern Medical Program, a distributed site of the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Medicine delivered in partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia.

Her extraordinary legacy of firsts began in 1997 when she became the first Indigenous woman to earn a medical degree at UBC, graduating at the top of her class. She has since gone on to become Canada's first female First Nations general surgeon.

"Nadine embodies the values of role-modelling, mentoring and changing the status quo that define the Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award," said Royal College CEO Andrew Padmos, MD, FRCPC, FACP. "She has become a shining example for others, especially Indigenous girls and women, to aspire to higher education and careers in science and medicine."

### **First Indigenous woman to establish a Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health**

As her surgical career took off, Dr. Caron carved out time to pursue research and teaching. She earned a Master's in Public Health from Harvard University, working with a community to draft a proposal for a Mohawk First Nations Health Centre that could also serve as a model for training Indigenous health professionals in Canada.

She was further inspired after accepting teaching opportunities at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health's Centre for American Indian Health.

"The curriculum was amazing and there was incredible capacity-building at the community level in research — it was exactly what we wanted to create in Canada," said Dr. Caron.

She took the opportunity to enrol students from UBC and the University of Northern British Columbia in the courses she was teaching at Johns Hopkins, enabling the transfer of new

skills and knowledge to influence curriculum development in Indigenous health at UBC.

In 2014, after much consultation with mentors, communities and colleagues, Dr. Caron co-created and became co-director of UBC's Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health. The Centre aims to not just reduce the disparity in health outcomes between Indigenous Peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts, but also optimize Indigenous wellness beyond the basic goal of health equity.

The Centre's focus on recruitment and retention is also increasing the number of Indigenous Peoples studying and working in health care professions. As well, its community-based programming is empowering Indigenous populations to play a greater role in improving their own health outcomes.

### **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. Caron who epitomize a zeal and devotion to the pursuit of rights and justice for Canada's Indigenous Peoples.

The award distinguishes individuals like its namesake, Thomas Dignan, O.Ont., MD, chair of the Royal College Indigenous Health Advisory Committee, who embrace cultural safety and understand the importance of the social determinants of health.

"Receiving the Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award is an incredible honour," said Dr. Caron. "Thank you for having this award, for realizing the importance of what this award means and for your support of Indigenous health."

For more information about our awards and grants program, visit the Royal College website at [www.royalcollege.ca/awards](http://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](http://royalcollege.ca).*

-30-

For more information, contact

**Melissa Nisbett**

Senior Communications Specialist

Tel: 613-730-8177 ext 426

Cell: 613-218-9570

[mnisbett@royalcollege.ca](mailto:mnisbett@royalcollege.ca)