



Erie St. Clair
Regional Cancer Program
in partnership with Cancer Care Ontario

MEDIA RELEASE

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MAKING CULTURAL PRACTICES EASIER FOR INDIGENOUS PATIENTS AT WRH

Windsor, ON. In an effort to better accommodate patient requests for Indigenous ceremonies at Windsor Regional Hospital (WRH), a new policy is now in effect. The Indigenous Practice Protocol outlines a step-by-step process detailing how traditional ceremonies, including smudging, can be safely conducted in a timely and respectful manner at each hospital campus.

Smudging is the Indigenous practice of burning sacred herbs and medicines including tobacco, sage, sweet grass and cedar as part of a ritual, or for cleansing or health purposes. It can involve brushing the smoke created over the body of the participant. Smudging is commonly done during times of sickness and at end of life.

“Each ceremony is performed with specific intention,” says Audrey Logan, WRH Indigenous Navigator. “Sometimes it is to ask for healing and sometimes to honor the passing of a relative or friend. For Indigenous patients who may be far from home when receiving medical care, the ceremony provides a sense of connection to spirit and peace.”

While WRH has always accommodated smudging requests, this policy will make it easier for staff members to act quickly and help patients carry out important cultural practices in a safe and comfortable environment.

The policy was developed with the support of Clinical Staff, Security and Fire Prevention, Spiritual Care and the Indigenous Navigator at WRH, as well as Cancer Care Ontario (CCO), and partners in local Indigenous Communities.

“This is a major step in addressing the barriers Indigenous patients face in hospital,” says Logan. “Often times our community members are uncomfortable asking for a smudging ceremony and when they do, staff members are unsure how to handle the request. Just talking about it and having guidelines will make it easier for all involved.”

Special rooms have been designated to accommodate the ceremonies at each Campus. The Atrium on the 4th floor will be used at the Met Campus, and the Multi-Faith Prayer Room will be used at the Ouellette Campus.

During the ceremony, a single plant or mixture of plants is placed in a shell or other fireproof bowl and lit. This produces a minimal amount of smoke. As part of the policy, the fire alarm in the dedicated

rooms will be shut off during the ceremony and water will be kept inside the room for use in the event of a fire.

Recognizing the value of Indigenous healing practices and using them in the treatment of patients in collaboration with Indigenous healers and Elders when requested by patients is one of the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission spent 6 years examining and documenting the harmful legacy of Canada's residential school system.

"The new Indigenous Practice Protocol is a significant achievement and demonstrates a commitment and respect for Indigenous people and traditional practice," says Alethea Kewayosh, Director of the CCO Indigenous Cancer Care Unit. "It's very commendable and encouraging to see hospital policy drafted through a collaborative process and it is my hope that other healthcare institutions are motivated to do the same."

The smudging protocol is also in line with the province's Smoke-Free Ontario Act, which acknowledges the traditional use of smudging and tobacco for cultural or spiritual purposes in hospitals.

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