

# Reflections on leadership and the CMA **Apology to Indigenous Peoples of Canada**



**Constance LeBlanc, MD**

On 18 September, I was privileged to attend the Canadia Medical Association's (CMA's) Apology to Indigenous Peoples of Canada for things done to them and not done for them by the medical profession in Canada.

In preparation, my friend Andrew took me kayaking in Oak Bay so that I could see firsthand the land and waters of the Songhees, Esquimalt, WSANEC, Tsartlip, Tseycum, Pauquachin, Scia'new, Tsawout, and other Indigenous Nations. This helped ground me for a fuller appreciation of the significance of the sentinel event. The seals, otters, and other wildlife were abundant on the peaceful bay, creating the perfect setting to centre myself for the next day.

As I have been in clinical practice now for 35 years, I live with the grim fact that residential schools were still operating when I started my practice. Forced or coerced sterilization persists today. Indigenous patients continue to experience racism in health care. Simply by looking and listening, we can see this in our milieu. ***We are sometimes not quite curious enough.***

I think of Dr. Peter Bryce (1853–1932), the public health physician and whistleblower who exposed the atrocities of residential schools in his pamphlet *The Story of a National Crime: Being an Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada*. He was curious. He risked all, accusing the government of neglect and was eventually forced to retire for having spoken truth to power, something so many others failed to do. ***He was curious enough and brave enough.***



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The art of Alan Syliboy, who was born and raised on Millbrook First Nation, is a celebration of Mi'kmaq culture, spirituality, and friendship.

The day started with a sunrise ceremony at Mungo Martin House. One cannot make amends until transgressions have been fully acknowledged and owned. This ceremony welcomed us to this space. The apology ceremony included singing and dancing but also tears, lots of tears, as we viewed documentary evidence of the egregious abuse perpetrated. The formal apology was heartfelt and moving. This is only the beginning; the work of reconciliation awaits us. ***We often lack humility.***

This will be a long process. The door is now open and what comes next will define us for the next generation. The hard work will be making real and meaningful change, helping others be more curious and understand, recalibrating our perspectives and moving to a better place where all can flourish. I have hope that through this chaos and pain, we will find a path to true reconciliation. This is not the work of the CMA alone but of everyone in health care — especially leaders.

***Be curious, be bold, speak truth to power — and to ignorance. Let's leave equitable and inclusive health care spaces and systems for those who will follow us.***

## **Acknowledgement**

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