



News Release



Saskatoon Health Region and St. Paul's Hospital commit to a better healthcare system for First Nations and Métis people

(October 14, 2016) Saskatoon – For Saskatoon Health Region employee, Neal Kewistep, seeing the Truth and Reconciliation flag raised will signify an important opportunity to right the wrongs and begin a journey of healing and change.

"Every day I see reluctance from the Indigenous community in accessing health care. The reluctance comes from mistrust between the Indigenous community and ourselves which is a symptom of the Residential School experience," says Kewistep, a residential school survivor. "Indigenous patients are over represented in our acute care environments and when this happens we have missed the opportunity to intervene earlier. I also see many healthcare workers perpetuate stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as there has been a lack of education and awareness around Residential Schools."

Today, Kewistep joined his father Gilbert, also a residential school survivor, to raise a Truth and Reconciliation flag during a historic ceremony as part of Saskatoon Health Region's and St. Paul's Hospital's commitment to action to the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report.

The flag raising at St. Paul's Hospital followed a private pipe ceremony with Elders, First Nations and Métis leaders, Residential School survivors, community partners and Saskatoon Health Region senior and operational leaders, along with St. Paul's Hospital board members and administration.

"Today we acknowledge the pain, loss and dislocation caused by the residential school system on individuals, families, communities and nations, and know we need to foster and maintain respectful relations with First Nations and Métis people, including our own staff, physicians, patients, clients, residents and their families," says Dan Florizone, President and CEO, Saskatoon Health Region. "Through our First Nations and Métis Health Service, we have begun a journey of change in our healthcare system offering many programs and services that demonstrate our commitment, including cultural competency training and workshops, translation services, and Elder and Residential School support staff. But we know this is only the beginning and we recognize we have much to do and that we need to improve in these areas to help achieve better health for all First Nations and Métis people."

"Today's raising of the Truth and Reconciliation flag is a visible acknowledgement that we are all on Treaty Six land, and a symbolic expression of our Hospital's deep commitment to and acknowledgement of the healing that is required in our community," says Jean Morrison, St. Paul's Hospital President and CEO. "Our Hospital has always provided services to a large proportion of First Nations and Métis patients, and we are committed to fostering respectful and equitable care that addresses emotional, physical, mental and spiritual healing in an environment that is welcoming to family and community."

During today's ceremony, Saskatoon Health Region and St. Paul's Hospital signed a Commitment to Action in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report calling for all Canadians to be part of the Reconciliation process to address the devastating impacts of the residential school system on the health and well-being of First Nations and Métis people.

"The raising of the Reconciliation flag shows the commitment that Saskatoon Health Region is demonstrating towards providing quality care to all First Nations people in Saskatoon and surrounding areas," says Saskatoon Tribal Council's Tribal Chief Felix Thomas. "By acknowledging the Residential school era and the impact it had on our community it not only strengthens our partnership with SHR, but helps solidify the quality service SHR provides to all First Nations people who receive care here in the city."

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"For so long, the Métis story with Canadian residential schools was not recognized. The hurt and harm our people experienced was very real and we continue today to feel the impact in our community," says Shirley Isbister, President Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. (CUMFI). "Saskatoon Health Region's recognition of this is an important step towards the emotional, mental and spiritual healing that must occur. We are so pleased by this clear demonstration of commitment and look forward to continued partnership in finding meaningful ways to implement change in order to create a culturally safe healthcare system for all of Saskatchewan's people."

Today's ceremony came as a result of collaboration between Saskatoon Health Region, St. Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon City Police, City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, CUMFI and Office of the Treaty Commissioner.

And for survivors such as Kewistep, acknowledging the past first is what is needed to move towards a different tomorrow.

"The Indigenous population represents the youngest and fastest growing population in our Health Region, so the time to take action is now," says Kewistep. "I think that our organization is positioned really well. We have the opportunity to right the wrongs and reset the relationship between the Indigenous community and ourselves. By doing this we are able to mobilize other sectors to do the same."