

Recalling 2016's Inspiring Northerners and Looking Forward into 2017

January 25, 2017

Dear Northerners,

Compassionate. Transformative. Active. Innovative. Collaborative.

These are a few of my favourite words from 2016. They're also the words that describe the exceptional people working to make a difference in the North East LHIN and beyond.

Speaking of making a difference, last December (2016), Ontario passed legislation to help build a health care system that's easier for people to navigate, better coordinated and more open and accountable at a local level. The **Patients First Act** is part of the government's ongoing work to create a more patient-centred health care system right across the province.

Through better coordination of primary care, home and community care, and public health information, Northerners will be able to more easily find a family doctor or nurse practitioner, get in to see them more quickly when ill, access the home care services they need, and be more informed about their health care options.

Looking ahead, there will be some structural changes such as the transfer of Community Care Access Centre staff and home and community care service delivery to the LHINs starting this spring. This change will help to strengthen home and community care coordination for Northerners. What it won't do is disrupt services or add extra bureaucracy. In fact, any potential savings will be reinvested to support patient care.

As we forge ahead in 2017, I'd like to take a moment to focus on the many outstanding people I met over the past year who are making a difference in our health care system.

I've been impressed time after time with the **compassionate** caregivers we have in the North.

I met **Rachelle Poirier**, a caregiver to her mother, at an announcement the LHIN was making about our investment in an Enhanced Care Seniors Support Program for people with responsive behaviours as a result of dementia. Rachelle knows how hard it is to communicate with, and care for, a loved one with dementia. This new program, part of our North East Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) system of care, offers enhanced staffing and different approaches and techniques for communicating and caring for older residents with dementia.



Rachelle Poirier

“Having a parent diagnosed with dementia quickly puts you on a journey of change. In my case, I was met with many challenges along the way when trying to access services in the community. BSO quickly became my lifeline for understanding behaviours, navigating the system and accessing support in the community,” said Rachelle.



Bronson McLaughlin-Assinewai, 13

And it's not just adults who are helping to set health care's **transformative** agenda. I was moved by 13-year-old **Bronson McLaughlin-Assinewai** who spoke at the launch of our *North East LHIN Aboriginal Health Care Reconciliation Action Plan* in September. “United we support each other,” he said. “We must be united in saving our culture for future generations.”

We've already put several of the plan's actions in place -- cultural competency training of our LHIN Board and staff with further training for close to 400 health service providers this year, and appointing an Aboriginal Co-Chair to our new Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Council. The reconciliation plan is a starting point on a journey to ensure more equitable health care services for Northeastern Ontario's Aboriginal people.

Can you believe that **Kerttu Haapamaki** is 94? I can't. I met this beautiful Finnish lady at Finlandia, where she has lived in one of its apartments since 2012. She's incredibly **active** – still driving, painting and knitting at least one pair of socks a week to donate to Finlandia's Ladies Auxiliary for fundraising. Arthritis in her back means she now gets a bit of help with housecleaning and uses a walker – but otherwise she is living on her own. Kerttu and her husband Vaino were among the original Board Members who founded and built Finlandia. The couple immigrated to Sudbury from Finland in 1951 – raising three boys. She now has five grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Kerttu moved into the Finlandiakoti apartments to be closer to her husband Vaino who had Alzheimer's and was a resident of its long-term care home until his passing a few years ago.



Kerttu Haapmaki with a photo of herself and other founding Finlandia Board members taken in the early 1980s.



Sir Mason Durie

Sir Mason Durie is not a Northerner; however, his **innovative work** as an Emeritus Professor of Maori Studies at Massey University in New Zealand certainly resonates with us here in Northeastern Ontario. I heard Professor Durie speak at the Vancouver *We Belong 2016* conference, which focused on the issue of suicide among Indigenous youth. He talked about the concept of “Whānau Ora” which is Māori for “family health.” Driven by Māori cultural values, its core goal is to empower communities and extended families -- supporting families within the community context rather than individuals within an institutional one. I talked about Professor Durie’s work at our inaugural meeting of the North East LHIN’s **Mental Health and Addiction Advisory Council** last November.

And finally, the one word that inspires me most continues to be the word **collaborative**. I continue to see the spirit of cooperation demonstrated in the willingness of our region’s health service providers to work together in trying to make care more patient-focused. I also see it in the eagerness of patients and their families to work with providers to improve care for their loved ones.

With **Dale Hall**, it all began with a simple question from him and his wife, Mary-Lynn, after they learned that we were establishing a regional dementia planning committee. When asked if they would like to get involved, his response was immediate. “Absolutely we would be interested in participating.” Now Dale is sitting around a multi-disciplinary table with regional geriatricians, other providers and a person with lived experience, to help develop a first-ever North East Dementia Strategy.



Dale Hall

That strategy is responding to the region’s sizeable growth in seniors (which is expected to grow from today’s 20% to 27% in another decade). Along with aging Northerners, is a projected increase in people with dementia. Dale and this collaborative committee are working to improve the system of care for people living with dementia, their families and caregivers.

It is inspiring people like Rachelle, Bronson, Kerttu, Dr. Durie and Dale who keep me motivated. As we move forward with the transformation changes required by the **Patients First** legislation, particularly in home and community care, let us remember that it is all about people and ensuring Northerners get the quality care that they need and the independence they want.

Louise Paquette

CEO of the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN)