

Med Life with Dr. Horton

# On good medicine

Jillian Horton MD

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This is an excerpt from a longer podcast. You can listen to the full interview here: [cmaj.ca/medlife](https://cmaj.ca/medlife)

LISA RICHARDSON is an internist of Anishinaabe descent and is a strategic advisor for Indigenous health in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto.

The interview was conducted by Dr. Jillian Horton, director of the Alan Klass Health Humanities Program at the Max Rady College of Medicine, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. She hosts *Med Life with Dr. Horton* on CMAJ Podcasts.

**Jillian Horton:** You've been influential in bringing Indigenous health to the forefront of medical education. What was your path to the work you are doing now?

**Lisa Richardson:** My mom is Anishinaabe and my dad is European. Medicine was a place where I could bring together these 2 different worlds, take the privileges with which I had grown up and make changes. I had studied both Biology and English. In Indigenous perspectives on science, we don't necessarily separate out art and science as in a Western bioscience framework. I also knew the experiences of Inuit and Métis peoples in our health system were not good ones. I realized that the place I could have the biggest impact was through education, making sure that every single one of our medical students would graduate with some understanding and knowledge of Indigenous health. When I became a staff physician, my passion for Indigenous health advocacy and education was not typical work so I've had to advocate to have that work recognized. We can talk about the impact of a publication in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, but what about the impact of mentoring even 1 Indigenous student, and teaching and thinking in different ways?

**JH:** A lot of emotional labour goes into work to create system change, and it's not necessarily rewarded in traditional academic structures.

**LR:** A part of that system change that I've been working on is, how do we actually recognize this? How do we redefine what we consider to be academic excellence in our academic health sciences faculties? And how do we recognize the importance of the

work that our communities recognize is important but that hasn't necessarily been allowed and recognized in these spaces? It's so critical.

**JH:** I learned so little during my training about Indigenous models of health and healing. Are there universally important concepts?

**LR:** We are now very conscious about recognizing that there isn't a single universal monolithic Indigenous perspective. "Good medicine," from an Anishinaabe world view is that everything we take in is "medicine," not just what we physically ingest. Good medicine is more than just a pill that you take for heart failure. Good medicine is food and having access to healthy food. Good medicine is relationships with family and community. Good medicine is about being able to participate in your culture and have access to ceremonial practices. Good medicine is about sleep. So it's so much broader than the way in which we conceptualize what is medicine in medicine. We speak about the medicine wheel teachings and it really is about understanding health as being multidimensional; it's about physical, emotional and spiritual health as well. We did a panel a few weeks ago and one of the Elders said, "The forest is my pharmacy."

**JH:** How do you care for yourself?

**LR:** The most helpful tool for me is going back to the 4 different dimensions of health. Being tuned in to what my physical needs are around sleep and physical activity, being attentive to what the mental stressors are of the job, what it's like when we care for someone who has died, and what it's like when we feel that we've made a mistake. When I'm deliberately thinking about mental well-being I think about that, and, if I've had a difficult experience in my clinical practice, I need to take time and space to think about it. And the emotional dimension of health for me is also a teaching that I've had that we don't exist in isolation, and so, what are those emotionally nurturing relationships in my life — paying attention to those relationships and nurturing them. And lastly, the spiritual realm is about what do I need to honour my role as someone who is responsible for healing others? I need to always be thinking about healing myself and my spirit to do that well.