

Bioethics Conference in Saskatoon Nov. 18, 2009

St. Pauls Hospital presents the fourth annual William F. Mitchell Bioethics Conference, Health Care Ethics in a Changing Context: First Nations, Metis and Immigrant Communities on Wednesday, Nov. 18 at the Rependa Auditorium at Saskatoon City Hospital. This conference will explore the themes of cultural diversity and cultural context in relation to the ethics of health care provision. All clinical and allied health workers, academics, community workers, health administrators, ethicists, human resource professionals, spiritual caregivers, researchers and members of Aboriginal and multicultural interest groups are invited to come and listen to the key-note speakers Dr. Joseph Chandrakanthan and Dr. Colleen Varcoe. For more information call Francis Maza, Mission Integration Director of Catholic Health Ministry of Saskatchewan, at: (306)249-5865 or visit: www.CatholicHealth.ca

The aims of this conference are:

1. To help health care workers, workers in community agencies and the general public better understand the ethical issues that can arise when health care systems and health care workers are providing care for people from First Nations, Metis and immigrant communities.
2. To help us better understand the importance of building cultural competency in our health care systems and professional lives.
3. To discuss how we may provide ethical care for people from First Nations, Metis and immigrant communities.
4. To examine the application of different schools in ethics in the care of people from First Nations, Metis and immigrant communities.
5. To understand issues arising in research conducted among people from First Nations, Metis and Immigrant communities.

The Keynote speakers who are funded by the WF Mitchell Bioethics Fund through the St Paul's Hospital Foundation, were chosen specifically to outline the ethical issues which arise in health care in a multicultural society (Fr Joseph Chandrakanthan) and in providing care to Aboriginal people (Dr Colleen Varcoe).

It is hoped that the conference will help health care workers and others gain a deeper understanding of how ethical frames of reference can improve caregiving to people from diverse cultures. For example, the ethical principle of justice can

act as an imperative for breaking down the barriers of access to health care. Sometimes, barriers of access to care are overt. Many more subtle barriers of access exist. This conference will be a place where they are identified and discussed. The processes of colonization have had a tremendous impact on the health of First Nations and Metis peoples. The disparities in health care between First Nations and Metis peoples and the general population in themselves are an imperative to work towards greater equality.

People from immigrant communities, particularly those who have suffered through war and under totalitarian regimes, often have complex medical presentations which include physical, psychological and mental health issues. Many refugees have suffered from experiences of war-related violence, torture and other forms of trauma. In addition, many have lived in refugee camps and as displaced persons, often experiencing such hardships as lack of food, clean water, and inadequate medical care. These experiences have tended to undermine trust in other people, particularly those who are perceived to be in positions of authority such as health care workers. In addition, people arriving from some countries have limited understanding of Western health care systems, face language barriers when accessing them, and have little knowledge of the role of the patient in giving informed consent to treatment and the importance of adhering to treatment regimes.

The closing panel session 'Focus on the Future' will enable the delegates to ask a group of academics and ethicists questions about how we can provide ethical care for people from First Nations, Metis and immigrant communities into the future.