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New sculpture unveiled at PRH represents wellness and reconciliation

PENTICTON – Patients, staff, physicians and guests gathered to unveil an important new artwork in a ceremony held in front of Penticton Regional Hospital (PRH) today.

“I would like to recognize those who have come together to bring such a beautiful and meaningful sculpture to the hospital’s entrance,” said Minister of Health Adrian Dix. “Today’s event also reflects a commitment to improve health and healing for the Syilx people and all Aboriginal patients and families who come through these doors.”

Inclusion of Aboriginal artwork at the hospital helps reduce barriers and create spaces that ensure Aboriginal people feel safe and acknowledged when accessing health services.

“I would like to thank the artist Clint George, who dedicated his time and talent to creating a piece of art that will help welcome patients and visitors to PRH,” said Interior Health Board Chair Doug Cochrane. “To me, this piece represents welcoming, wellness, and moving forward together.”

Today’s event is also recognition of the need to address health disparities and move toward reconciliation, something Health Service Administrator Carl Meadows is passionate about.

“Reconciliation with our First Nations and Aboriginal peoples needs to be more than a gesture,” he said. “You have to ‘feel to heal and tell to get well.’ This art unveiling is symbolic of the kindness of the Penticton Indian Band, on whose land now sits Penticton Regional Hospital.”

The sculpture, entitled *Purifying Sculpture*, was created by Syilx Nation artist Clint George, a member of the Penticton Indian Band. The six foot by four foot metallic sculpture depicts a large abalone shell (a “smoke bowl”) and accompanying bundle of sweetgrass, as well as a seven-foot-long feather. These items are used in “smudging” – a traditional ritual to remove negativity and bless an object, place or person.

“This represents our smudge bowl ceremonial kit that a lot of North American Indians use for prayer and healing,” says Clint. “It is a symbol that is used in a lot of different cultures around the world, and is based around the grasses and the smoke. For me, it is used when I need it, whether it be different parts of the day, season or ceremonies. It helps calibrate my grounding to Mother Earth and my spirituality to Mother Earth on a daily basis. It is a sculpture I have wanted to do for many years, and this was a perfect time and place to be able to build it.”

“On behalf of the Penticton Indian Band, a member community of the Syilx Nation, we are very appreciative of the efforts of Penticton Regional Hospital to undertake such a significant event to recognize the long-term relationship that our people have had in times of adversity, discrimination, and racism. Today is a day to celebrate together. Thank you all so much,” says Penticton Indian Band Chief Chad Eneas.

The sculpture was funded through the generosity of an anonymous donor. It is located outside the main entrance to the hospital, near Admitting and the Emergency Department.

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“This new sculpture and the symbol of the smoke bowl signifies both wellness and ceremony,” said Brad Anderson, Interior Health’s Corporate Director of Aboriginal Health. “In accordance with our Aboriginal Health and Wellness strategy, we strive to work with our community partners to create patient-centred programs and services to meet the needs of all patients. The inclusion of artwork such as this sculpture helps IH to remove barriers and supports these goals.”

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