# The Power of Traditional Wellness: Indigenous Cancer Mapping

BC Cancer · BC Patient Safety & Quality Council · First Nations Health Authority · British Columbia Ministry of Health

Legend: GAP = ☐

## Pre-Diagnosis

This is a journey. Some people do it multiple times.

Awareness of early screening is essential!

Fear of going to hospital prevents seeking care

I had a gut feeling something was wrong

I had a dream I had cancer

Traditional medicine: people in community provided immediate support

Not having a GP makes it difficult for screening + consistency

No walk-in clinics up north: have to use the ER

No warning signs: went to hospital for other issues → Discover cancer

Routine testing revealed cancer → Wait for biopsy:

Initial assessment: "It's probably nothing." – Mis-diagnosis

Some have short wait… …others have 2 month wait.

Fear: I didn't want to call

I had to call to complain about the wait!

Sometimes takes multiple visits to GP before more tests ordered!

## Diagnosis

Trauma of diagnosis

How do I tell my family? They'll be upset!

Is this a death sentence?

What next?

Medical terms are hard to understand!

Waiting for next steps was difficult

No treatment other than western medicine

BC Cancer is fragmented across rural BC

FNHA has a book on the journey

No info: Who are my doctors? Who is my team? No one could tell me!

## Overarching Themes:

- Power of prayer, traditional medicines, connection to land
- We are strong warriors, and positive thinking is key
- Maintain cultural sovereignty of clients you're serving.
- Family supports are essential: consistent person to attend appointments
- "I'm sorry that's our policy" is frustrating
- Nurse practitioner can fill the GP role
- Our cultures aren't all the same
- Aboriginal patient navigator

## Resistance

From Dr.s and specialists

"I hid my traditional medicine from my doctors."

## The Power of Traditional Medicine

Ancestors · Cold water · The land · Food · Smudging · Prayer · Sweats

Aboriginal Nurse Navigator helped bridge gap in nurses' awareness

Healing Room at Prince George used for smudging, drumming, gatherings

## Support

Staff in hospital not always culturally aware…

…better awareness in smaller communities

There are no rural supports

Only one Indigenous counsellor for north

Family · Online forums · Church

Not all communities have internet

In BC it's hard to find support in general

I had to go on E.I.

## Treatment

### Financial

Local fundraisers · Tight budget · Some nations have funds · Had to sell possessions

Family

Generosity of community

Barriers to care cause stress

Non-insured health benefits: no support for traditional medicine

Not always clear how to access funds, especially between provinces!

### Travel

Being without family was hard when travelling for care

The challenge of weather + travel isn't always considered!

Canadian Cancer Society: cancer lodges have food (no traditional) and good access, but no privacy.

Nothing is sanitized on planes, ambulances – can make you sick!

## Next Chapter

We weren't fully informed about treatments, surgeries, options, or why things were happening

"I wasn't given a choice in treatment: 'You're having a masectamy'" "You're having chemo"

Chemo was toxic and had terrible side effects

Sometimes treatments work…

…other times told you have limited time left

"You're wrong – I'm not going anywhere!"

"Telehealth allows you to see expressions"

"Follow-up calls were so appreciated"

"Experienced positive care throughout my journey"

Pharmacists: source of info, often know funding available for medication

Treatment has side-effects: physical, emotional. Take time to heal

After care doesn't exist – have to support yourself

Lack of family = lonely, hopeless

You'll be ok, mom

I still don't fully understand my cancer

Family is essential

Churches can be a support

We need Indigenous groups

No access to: counsellors, physio, group support in community

Recognize the burden they bear.

The Journey continues… …it never ends!

Communities are providing end-of-life care – they need support!

Journey map by: fuselight creative — thefuselight.com