

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

The Spirit of Stone

If you've ever travelled across the prairies or through the wilds of Ontario chances are you have seen a "glacial erratic". These stones are glacially deposited rocks which differ from the type of rock common to the area in which it rests. Such erratics are carried by glacial ice, often for hundreds of kilometres.

While glacial erratics are geological wonders and are worth pulling the car over to view, Indigenous Peoples have understood that such deposits are more than just the effects of chance glacial movements.

For the Blackfoot people, located in what is now southern Alberta, the Okotok ("Big Rock") is a sacred object. More than just mere geology, this rock tells a story and gives meaning. For many other Indigenous groups such stones speak of the ongoing presence of ancestors, the provision of healing and the gift of physical and spiritual direction.

We can learn much from stone. When we are feeling vulnerable, stone can remind us of resiliency and groundedness. When we feel our lives moving erratically, stone reminds us of presence and stability. In his blessing *For Those Who Are Exhausted* Irish poet John



Okotok ("Big Rock"), Kasia Sokulska, MiKSMedia-used with permission

O'Donahue wrote "draw alongside the silence of stone until its calmness can claim you."

Glacial erratics are also an apt metaphor for the presence and work of Spiritual Health Practitioners (SHPs) in Island Health. Like glacial erratics SHPs have undergone a significant journey of spiritual and professional formation to bring them to their roles. Clinical Psychospiritual Education, the educational program for Spiritual Health Professionals, has an entry to practice requirement of a minimum of 1200 hours of post-master's training where individuals dig deep into

Draw alongside
the silence of stone
until its calmness can claim you.

John O'Donahue

From the Blessing "For One Who is Exhausted"

self-awareness and learn how to properly attend to the spiritual needs of people from any tradition or belief system. Enrollment in a unit of CPE is a weighty endeavour that shapes the SHP, carving off rough edges and moving them to be solid, trustworthy, dependable care providers.

Another uniqueness about glacial erratics is that they stand out. On the rolling horizon of the prairie you can see these stones a long way off. They are different from the regular landscape. So too in health care SHPs stand out. Even though they are members of the interdisciplinary team they are unique in how they care for people. Their concern and approach to supporting an individual's distress over issues pertaining to identity, meaning and purpose are unique. They also stand out because not only do they address the existential and spiritual needs of patients and families but also those of health care staff. SHPs stand out in health care as being care team members who are tasked to be solid, dependable folk that anyone can access to help find meaning, orientation and hope.

At the end of June Island Health's Spiritual Health program says farewell to one of our own. Peter Shurvin has been the Spiritual Health Practitioner at the RJH for 29 years and will be retiring on June 30. Peter, whose name literally means "stone" (Greek - *petros*) has exemplified the spirit of stone. He has been a constant presence on the landscape of RJH. He is trustworthy, safe and approachable. Peter was able to usher in calm for whoever, whenever. We will miss Peter's presence immensely but are excited to welcome Stephanie Blyth to the SHP role at RJH in his stead. Stephanie officially begins her role on Monday, July 4.

While SHPs provide professional spiritual health care in Island Health we also recognize that each of us, in various ways, can "be stone" to our colleagues. Each of us can be someone that people are drawn to in order to be steadied in the midst of work and life. We are all blessed to be able to be this for each other – and we are all blessed for the rock solid people in our lives.

NUMA (Greek for "spirit/breath") is produced by Island Health's Spiritual Health team to draw awareness to issues of spirituality in health care. The editor of numa is Darren Colyn, Spiritual Health Leader. To read past issues of NUMA go to the [Spiritual Health public webpage](#).



As I give Stephanie Blyth the keys to the office, I also give her the care of you all: the staff and doctors of the RJH. You are in good hands.

And likewise, I give Stephanie into your care. May you work with her with the same care and grace and humour as you worked with me.

Thank you.

By "you" I mean everyone who has worked at the Royal Jubilee Hospital over the 29 years I have had the privilege of being here.

You have welcomed me, helped me, taught me, laughed with me and cried with me.

You have supported me when things were rough, professionally and personally.

A while ago I figured out that being a Care-Giver may be a profession, but it is also a lifestyle. Care-Givers care because that is who they are. I am grateful for having shared work and life with so many people here who care for others and for each other.

*May you know that you are good;
that you are better than some of your outcomes;
that you are loving, and you are loved;
that you are a blessing,
to your patients and to each other.*

Know too, that you have helped make my life here better. Thank you.