

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

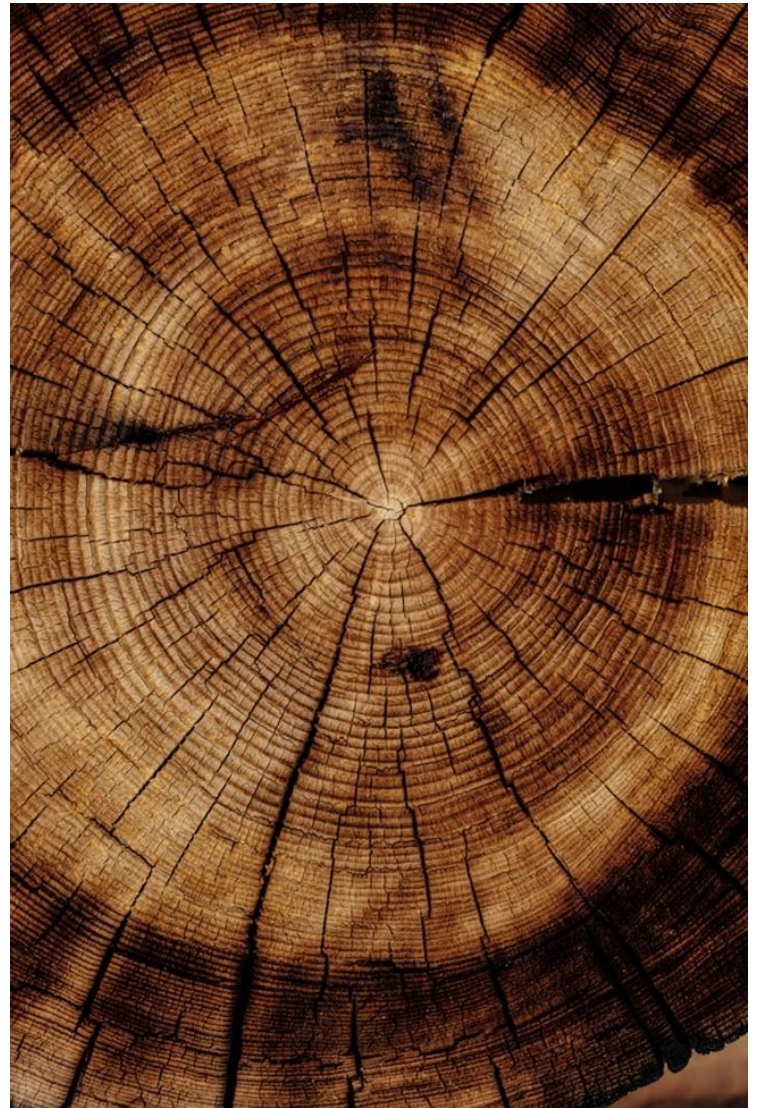
Subduction

As beautiful and tranquil as this island is we know that powerful forces are constantly at work beneath the mountains, trees and waterways that surround us. We live on what is known as a subduction zone which is where tectonic plates meet - pushing into and grinding against each other. In our immediate context a thinner oceanic plate is currently pushing and descending beneath a thicker continental plate. As these plates push and move against each other immense pressure builds. Over time this pressure is released in the form of earthquakes, shaking the earth above due to the subterranean collision below.

I share this geological reality not only because we will participate in the [Shake Out BC](#) event this week but also because it is an apt metaphor for what happens to people when their lives push against the challenges of illness and trauma. A similar subduction event happens in their hearts and pressure builds, due to the unknown, and spirits can be shaken. The pressure is often released and expressed with hard questions - *Will I be ok? What happens if I die? What will my life look like now? Will I still be able to have a meaningful life? Am I of any value? What is the meaning of all this?*

As health care providers we witness these impacts every day in the lives of the people we care for. Whether it is a miscarriage, stroke, car accident, surgery, mental health crisis, cancer diagnosis or transfer to an alternate level of care - we see the many ways that lives are shaken when they grind up against the thick wall of ill health. As health care providers we all do our part to alleviate the pressure and pain from those collisions.

As we again celebrate Spiritual Health Awareness Week (Oct. 20-26) we note the unique dimension of care that Spiritual Health Practitioners (SHP) provide across the island. SHPs are adeptly trained to



help individuals navigate their life's collision with illness. SHPs recognize the dissonance, fear and disorientation that lies below the surface and strive, through various therapeutic interventions, to support a person so that the illness does not push them under. SHPs utilize an individuals inner and outer sources of strength (beliefs, values, practices, community connections) in order to

help them find meaning, hope and calm amidst whatever is pushing against and shaking up their lives.

Not only do patients experience such collisions - but health care staff do as well. Health care professionals of all disciplines, grind against various challenges that shake them such as moral distress, complex care situations, workplace grief, or finding a lack of meaning/purpose in their work. Here too SHPs can support staff feeling overcome by what they are bumping up against in their work and life.

As beautiful as this island is we know that part of its beauty comes directly from enduring all the geological upheaval of the past. The mountains, the lakes the shape of a shoreline are all formed by that ancient upheaval. And the same is true for each of us and the people we care for. Yes, we all face challenging and painful times – but with good supports we can oftentimes be wondrously transformed by the very things that press us so powerfully.

Spiritual Health Awareness Week

Oct. 20-26

Celebrating Island Health's Spiritual Health Practitioners who, in an average month, support

1000

patients / family members

200

staff (1:1 & team debriefings)

For more information and to find your nearest SHP go to the [Spiritual Health intranet page](#).

Welcoming Island Health's Newest SHPs

Matthew Dempsey, SHP – CVH

Recently the BC Ministry of Health committed to supporting 10, 1-year-long pilot SHP positions in various underserved healthcare settings across the province. The pilot position in Island Health is at CVH where Matt is the SHP.



Thy-Thy (Tee-Tee) Quach, SHP – RJH

Over the past few months Thy-Thy has joined the Spiritual Health team as the casual SHP for our south island sites. She is currently assigned to coverage at RJH.



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