

The Honourable Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins engaged in serious discussions with community members Ken and Sonya Sault whose daughter Makayla Rain Sault experienced difficulties within the medical institution before her tragic passing. Photo by Dave Laforce

Harmonizing health care discussed at two-day conference



The two-day Moving Forward Together conference on harmonizing Indigenous wellness in medicine and health practices was described by some as a watershed moment in breaking down the walls between modern mainstream medicine and Indigenous medicines and practices. After speeches and testimonials of personal experiences of Six Nations community members, the gathering broke into focus groups to discuss exactly what a harmonized system would look like. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE.

By Jim Windle

OHSWEKEN – A precedent was set about a year ago in a Brantford courtroom by Justice Gethin Edward who ruled that an 11-year-old Onkwehon:we girl could not be forced to undergo chemotherapy, but could pursue alternative means including traditional medicines.

That decision caused ripples throughout the medical profession, which has opened the door to a new way of respecting both western and traditional medicines on equal grounds. The first formal gathering of health care professionals, traditional practitioners and the Ontario Government was described by some as a watershed moment in medicine and Canada's health care system.

Among those who attended the two-day meeting of the minds at the Six Nations Community Hall were Chiefs of Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs David Zimmer, President of McMaster Children's Hospital Peter Fitzgerald, Elected Chief Ava Hill, President and CEO of Hamilton Health Scienc-

es Robert MacIsaac, the Honourable Justice Gethin Edward, and Minister of Health and Long Term Care Dr. Eric Hoskins.

Dozens of health care workers, doctors and traditional healers together took up a good portion of the main auditorium of the Six Nations Community Hall on November 27th and 28th. The importance of this meeting was captured by Regional Chief Isadore Day. "This is a very important meeting for a number of people," Day told the *Two Row Times*.

"Commitments are being made by governments to finally listen to First Nations both provincially and federally. What we need to do is to make sure that our

indigenous value systems and indigenous health care systems become part of the solution. We definitely want to use this opportunity effectively and include our position, our rights and jurisdiction on health and we want to make sure that becomes part of the dialogue. That's why this meeting is so important. It brings people together to make sure the leaders get that message." Day commended Six Nations and the Mississaugas of the New Credit for taking the lead, saying that the problems faced by families of two Six Nations girls who opted for traditional and alternative medicines should never be allowed to happen again.

"We need to be coordinated and work to-

gether," said Day "There is both mainstream and traditional world views in healthcare systems and it shouldn't always be one or the other. It could be a combination of both and it makes sense to all of us to start combining these efforts and really give recognition to indigenous health care systems in the mainstream today.

Chief Ava Hill also held out hope that things would change when it comes to recognizing traditional medicine as an alternative to the mainstream medical

profession.

"I think these meetings are very important," she said. "The importance of this has been expressed by the people we have had here speaking and making announcements. We've got the Minister of Health here, President of Hamilton Health Science, Regional Chief Isadore Day, and I think everyone knows the importance of what we are doing here."

She was also pleased and encouraged at the number of frontline mainstream healthcare work-



Justice Gethin Edward.
PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE



Chiefs of Ontario Regional Chief, Isadore Day.
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