

WOMEN'S NOW

GENEROSITY AT WORK. REVOLUTION IN ACTION.

OUR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

As Chief of Psychiatry at Women's College Hospital, Dr. Simone Vigod is leading Canada's largest research and clinical program with a unique focus on women's mental health. **Read more inside.**

INSIDE

Transforming care for mental health, trauma and addiction



Charlyn's addiction counsellors told her about Women's College Hospital's Trauma Therapy Program (TTP) – one of the only therapy programs in Canada specifically designed for people who have experienced childhood trauma – and she quickly got started with the assessment and enrollment process.

Using an anti-oppressive approach that recognizes the unique social and cultural experiences of women and marginalized communities, TTP offers primarily group-based psychotherapy for survivors of childhood trauma. As part of the hospital's strategy to break down barriers to care by shifting the majority of clinics and services online, TTP is offered both in-person and online in an adapted virtual format – which has enabled patients to continue to receive support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Studies show that at least 1/3 of Canadians have experienced childhood abuse or maltreatment. The impacts are far-reaching – survivors struggle with mental and physical health challenges, their sense of self and relationships with others, and experience difficulties with safe self-care as they try to cope with the pain and distress their childhood trauma has left them with,” says Dr. Simone Vigod, Women's College Hospital's chief of psychiatry. “These struggles often make it difficult for survivors to seek out and access health care and support. Through the TTP and our virtual care strategy, we're focused on both increasing access to care for all childhood trauma survivors and ensuring that the care we provide meets their unique needs and is inclusive of our diverse population.”

Recognizing a lack of trauma-informed therapy across the healthcare system despite extensive need, the program team is also launching a pilot program to train community-based healthcare providers across Ontario to offer trauma-informed care. The project has the potential to reach thousands of people living with PTSD provincially while serving as a model for other healthcare leaders throughout Canada and beyond.

For Charlyn, who began online group therapy sessions with TTP in September 2020, the impact on her life and well-being has been profound.

“It's given me my life back,” she says. “It's helped me to learn how to process my feelings and how to deal with situations as they arise. It's given me greater acceptance of my past experiences and how they affect me today. It's allowed me to live my life authentically and take care of myself. And it's let me know that I'm not alone.”

Your generosity makes life-changing programs like TTP possible. If you would like to deepen your support, donate online today at www.wchf.ca or call 416-323-6323. Thank you!

It wasn't until Charlyn sought treatment for substance abuse that she discovered the true root cause of her addiction issues: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stemming from a devastating history of childhood trauma.

“I was a mess, but I didn't know anything about PTSD,” she says now. “My addiction problems, my co-dependency issues, my unhealthy relationships – I just thought that was my life.”

Abandoned by both of her parents as a child, Charlyn lived in 10 different homes by the time she was 15 years old. Throughout her formative years, she experienced sexual, emotional and physical abuse, often at the hands of those who were supposed to be caring for her.

Although Charlyn did her best to move forward – having three beautiful children, getting married and buying a house – the consequences emerged in waves throughout adulthood, presenting as addiction and substance abuse.

Two years ago, when she realized that she was struggling to find any meaning in life, she decided it was time to seek help at an addiction treatment facility. It was only then that she learned PTSD stemming from childhood trauma was the driver behind her challenges.

WHAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE?

The body is inextricably linked to trauma and holds the scars – both visible and non-visible – of past experiences. These experiences can leave survivors feeling overwhelmed and unsafe in their own skin.

Trauma-informed care ensures that a healthcare or service provider is informed about and sensitive to the impact of trauma and adjusts how care is delivered in order to accommodate trauma survivors' unique vulnerabilities.

Providers understand the intersections of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism, ableism, ageism, and the like, and give thoughtful consideration to who experiences trauma and how people are treated within healthcare institutions, while recognizing the challenges and on-going learnings required to effectively do so.

Through trauma-informed care, survivors feel safe and have as much control and choice over their care as possible, and providers can ensure services and treatment are not re-traumatizing.

THE SLAIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION COMMITS \$30 MILLION TO TRANSFORM MENTAL HEALTHCARE

Recognized as a global leader in developing effective and innovative approaches to mental healthcare for women and underserved communities, Women's College Hospital was honoured in early March to be the recipient of a groundbreaking \$1 million gift from The Slight Family Foundation.

The Slight Family Foundation's gift to Women's College Hospital was part of an extraordinary \$30 million collective commitment to 19 Canadian organizations identified as delivering innovative mental health services.

Their gift to Women's College Hospital will directly support the expansion of the hospital's world-leading Trauma Therapy Program with the implementation of community-based trauma therapy groups in six sites throughout Ontario, also including the use of virtual care – reaching an estimated 13,000 individuals who otherwise may not have access to the care they so urgently need.

At the Centre for Wise Practices in Indigenous Health – the first hospital-based centre of its kind to develop a comprehensive strategy for building inclusive healthcare spaces that incorporate traditional practice – the Foundation's investment will enable the growth of trauma-informed, collaborative and community-led mental health initiatives that will ensure equitable access to whole mind, body, spirit and heart support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals.

“Women's College Hospital is a leading expert in addressing access barriers and delivering care that meets the unique needs of every individual,” says Gary Slight, President and CEO of The Slight Family Foundation. “Their work is creating deep, systemic impact across the healthcare system, making them a natural choice for inclusion in The Slight Family Foundation Mental Health Initiative. We're delighted to be able to provide this support.”

Building capacity across Canada's mental health sector is more urgent now than ever before as COVID-19 continues to take a profound toll on the mental health of Canadians. Even before the pandemic, Canada was already in the midst of a historic mental health crisis, with half of all Canadians experiencing a mental health disorder by age 40.

We extend our deepest gratitude to The Slight Family Foundation for its transformational investment in mental health and for recognizing the important role Women's College Hospital plays within Ontario in providing inclusive, patient-centred care.



Julie Martins, grateful WCH patient, and her family joined in the fun at last year's virtual Run for Women in support of Women's College Hospital.

SIGN UP TODAY FOR THE VIRTUAL RUN FOR WOMEN!

Registration is now open for the 2021 virtual Run for Women presented by Shopper's Drug Mart's LOVE. YOU. Program!

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to impact stress and anxiety levels across the country, you can join an UNSTOPPABLE community of thousands of runners and walkers coming together to support the mental health of women and their families.

When you register for the Toronto event, every dollar that you raise from friends and family will directly support Women's College Hospital's Department of Psychiatry – the largest clinical and research program of its kind in Canada with a unique focus on the mental health needs of women.

Not only is this an opportunity to support our hospital, but it's an opportunity to take care of yourself.

Research clearly shows that exercise that raises your heart rate for at least 25 minutes can have an anti-depressant effect! In fact, Canadian clinical guidelines now recognize aerobic exercise as a first line treatment for mild to moderate depression.

This year, we can all use a little help boosting our overall mental health as the challenges of the pandemic continue to affect us all.

Sign up to walk or run on your own or create a team with your loved ones so you can participate together virtually and keep each other motivated!


You can complete your virtual run or walk any time between July 4 and 11, 2021, where and when is convenient for you! On July 11, tune in online for a special livestream event celebrating the entire Run for Women community.

Every participant will receive an official Run for Women bracelet from partner Foxy Originals, a t-shirt and a swag bag filled with over 30 products and coupons valued at over \$100.

Register online

Visit <https://www.runforwomen.ca/Cities/Toronto.aspx> or scan the QR code below with your phone to register for the 2021 Run for Women today.





Dr. Payal Agarwal demonstrates how to use an oxygen monitoring device as part of WCH's virtual COVIDCare@Home program.

TESTING THE IMPACT OF A COMMON ANTIDEPRESSANT ON COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

As one of Canada's top health research centres, Women's College Hospital has joined global efforts to find effective treatments for patients diagnosed with COVID-19.

Around the world, a growing number of studies are underway to identify new approaches to reduce the severity of COVID-19 symptoms and save more lives. With variants increasing rates of hospitalization and death from the virus, this work is more urgent than ever.

At Women's College Hospital, two leading scientists – Dr. Simone Vigod, Chief of Psychiatry, and Dr. Payal Agarwal, Innovation Fellow – are spearheading the Ontario arm of the STOP COVID 2 clinical trial, which is testing the impact of a common antidepressant, fluvoxamine, on COVID-19 symptoms.

“Early findings from a pilot study showed that fluvoxamine may have the potential to reduce lung injury, which is promising for

patients experiencing mild symptoms of COVID-19,” says Dr. Agarwal, who is also a family physician at Women's College Hospital's Family Practice Health Centre. “It shows potential to improve the well-being of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 and may open doors to the study of other medications as possible treatment options to prevent hospitalization in community based patients with COVID-19.”

STOP COVID 2 is a collaboration with the Research Institute of McGill University Health Centre and the partner study to a U.S. trial being led by Washington University in St. Louis.

The study is open to individuals from across the U.S. and Canada who meet specific eligibility criteria. It is entirely contactless, meaning that volunteers can participate without having to leave home. To learn more about the trial, visit <https://stopcovid2.idtrials.com>.

Here's to infusing
Ontario with opportunity.



Illustration by Rachel Joanis

CREATING A HEALTHIER, MORE EQUITABLE ONTARIO!

Throughout the month of March, in celebration of International Women's Day, the LCBO invited people across Ontario to show their support for a healthier, more equitable future by donating to Women's College Hospital.

We are absolutely thrilled to share that the campaign raised an incredible \$2.1 million through online and point-of-purchase donations! Thank you to the LCBO and to every customer and community member from Petawawa to Point Pelee, Dryden to Dunnville who contributed to this record-breaking outcome.

For over 90 years, the LCBO has put social responsibility at the core of its mandate. In 2019, it introduced its Spirit of Sustainability strategy which focuses on three key pillars: Good People, Good Planet, Good Partners.

Women's College Hospital Foundation is extremely honoured to be chosen as a key beneficiary and Equity Partner for this strategy which has a vision to ensure everyone has access to the resources they need to thrive. Proceeds from this March campaign are directly supporting two key areas of impact at Women's College Hospital: equity-focused research and the Substance Use Service program.

Home to one of the only hospital-based research institutes in the world uniquely focused on improving health equity for women and marginalized populations, Women's College Hospital's research initiatives are closing health gaps in diagnosis and clinical treatment for patients across Ontario and beyond.

The Substance Use Service program, a world leader in improving access to treatment and support for individuals struggling with addiction, is also a central coordinator for substance use clinics in over 55 communities province-wide.

We are so grateful to the LCBO and generous community members across Ontario for helping us in our mission to revolutionize healthcare for a healthier, more equitable world!

**Join the movement
to revolutionize
healthcare.
Donate today!**

Giving is easy

- Call the Foundation at **416-323-6323**
- Visit **www.wchf.ca** and click on **Ways to Give** or **Donate**
- Visit us on the fourth floor of Women's College Hospital (76 Grenville St., Toronto)

We love hearing from you!

If you have any feedback about this issue of Women's Now, questions about donating or simply want to connect with a member of your Foundation staff team, please contact **Alex Cheesman** at **alex.cheesman@wchospital.ca** or **416-323-6323 ext. 2319**.

Let's stay in touch!

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YOUR SUPPORT!**

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