

Book review: *Quarantined: Life and Death at William Head Station, 1872–1959*



By Peter Johnson. Victoria: Heritage House, 2013. ISBN 978-1-927527-31-3. Paperback, 312 pages. \$22.95.

Peter Johnson is a good writer, and the assembled pictures of William Head wonderfully evoke the time, place, and historic process quarantine played in our country. The images are also all that the average Canadian is going to see of the old quarantine station, unless they are more fortunate than I was in getting past the prison guard. The author does a commendable job of describing the rocky road leading to the development of a world-class maritime quarantine station with its specialized equipment, dangers, and the ever-present problems of politics, media, and accommodating the class

expectations of the day. At the end of the book, his interviews with people who lived and worked at William Head are an engaging human touch.

The author does have related recurring themes in the book: the hypocrisy of the inscription on the Statute of Liberty, protecting the public vs infringement of civil liberties, and his favorite—British snobbery, classism, and racism. With the third theme, it is as if he thinks his audience won't get the point unless he frequently reminds them of it. He also gives unreferenced opinions. He refers to the federal government's "niggling neglect." A primary reference to the auditor general's report from the year in question would have been much more convincing. Historical novelists use their own adjectives to describe historical figures. So does Peter Johnson. In British Columbia's first quarantine debacle he describes Mayor Lewis of Victoria "grinning like a Cheshire cat" and says that the quarantine officer, Dr Matthews, "simpered about, vaccinating everyone in sight." This technique may enliven the story but it

is at the expense of credibility.

Farley Mowat said of himself, "I never let facts get in the way of a good story." Has Peter Johnson sacrificed focused scholarship for the sake of his story?

—Ian A. Cameron, MD
Sherbrooke, NS

PAR-BC 2013 award winners

PAR-BC recently announced the winners of its 2013 Awards of Excellence. Dr Katherine Beadon received the Residents' Advocate Award, given to recognize an individual who advocates on behalf of residents and in doing so improves their well-being. Dr Michelle Linekin received the Dr Patricia Clugston Memorial Award for Excellence in Teaching, given to recognize a clinical faculty for his or her contributions to the continuing medical education of residents. Dr Megan Kilvert received the Award of Merit, given to recognize a resident physician whose outstanding achievements or leadership reflect the aims and objectives of PAR-BC. Congratulations to all recipients.

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Transforming health care for northern First Nations

The Northern First Nations Health Partnership Committee has released a document summarizing a comprehensive plan developed with the guidance and direction of northern First Nations community leadership over the past year. The document (*Implementing Our Health and Wellness Plan: An Overview*) communicates the work of transforming the health system for northern First Nations. Goals relate to developing cultural competency and safety, improving accessibility of services, supporting mental wellness, developing collaborative communications activities, and supporting a locally representative health workforce. The committee also identified four goals as working priorities for the 2014 year: cultural competency, primary health care, public and population health, and mental wellness and substance use.

Over 35% of the First Nations population in BC lives in the northern region, where First Nations face distinct health service challenges due to the many remote communities spread out over a vast area. The ongoing partnership between Northern Health, the First Nations Health Authority, and the First Nations Health Council is creating new opportunities and solu-

tions to the challenges related to health service delivery while acknowledging the wider social determinants that impact health and wellness. The Northern First Nations Health Partnership Committee was established to implement the goals of the Northern Partnership Accord (signed in 2012). The committee includes representation from Northern Health, the First Nations Health Council, First Nations Health Authority, and northern First Nations.

The document is available online at www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/NFNHPC_Implementing_Our_Health_and_Wellness_Plan_Overview.pdf.

Quality of care a factor in heart health

The quality of health care that people receive may be as important as controlling the risk factors—smoking, bad diet, and low exercise—that could lead to cardiovascular disease. These findings were revealed in a recent study conducted by an international team of scientists, including Simon Fraser University health sciences professor Dr Scott Lear.

The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiologic (PURE) study tracked more than 156 000 people in 17 coun-

tries and revealed that low-income countries, where people have the lowest risk factors for cardiovascular problems, have the highest rates of cardiovascular events and death. High-income countries, on the other hand, where people have the highest risk factors for heart conditions, have a lower rate of severe heart problems and deaths.

Study participants were from both urban and rural areas of four low-income countries: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe; 10 middle-income countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Iran, Malaysia, Poland, South Africa, and Turkey; and three high-income countries: Canada, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates.

Dr Lear co-authored the article and is also the Pfizer/Heart and Stroke Foundation chair in cardiovascular prevention research at St. Paul's Hospital.

The article, "Cardiovascular Risk and Events in 17 Low-, Middle-, and High-Income Countries," is published in the 28 August 2014 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and is available online at www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1311890.

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Youth Mental Health project—building awareness and empowering transition-age youth

While an estimated 12% to 20% of transition-age youth (15 to 24 years old) in British Columbia suffer from some form of mental illness, the majority will not seek professional intervention. The reasons for this include a lack of understanding of mental health and how to recognize mental illness, a lack of awareness about where to seek assistance, and the stigma attached to mental illness.

Some of the most common mental health challenges experienced by transition-age youth, including depression and anxiety, can be properly diagnosed and treated in a primary health care setting, yet many youth do not realize that physicians are a resource for mental health concerns. The Doctors of BC Council on Health Promotion (COHP) made this issue a major focus for 2013/14.

It is clear that youth must be equipped with knowledge about mental health and have skills and coping strategies to deal with the transition to independence. Already, many organizations in British Columbia, and across Canada have developed excellent mental health information, tools, and resources for youth, families, schools, and health care providers. There exists an opportunity for Doctors of BC to raise awareness among youth and to increase the like-



lihood that this population will work with their primary care physicians to address mental health concerns.

After engaging with key stakeholders (from government to community groups and youth) Doctors of BC produced a policy paper that committed to highlight for patients, families, and physicians the existing local and regional mental health resources, services, and programs. Physicians are encouraged to make use of tools such as the PSP Youth Mental Health Module when appropriate to their practice.

The paper also recommends that government and health authorities take action to address system capacity

issues and to disseminate information on available mental health resources to physicians.

A key part of the project is the promotion of existing tools that enable youth, parents, and teachers to assess mental health concerns and to connect with primary care physicians. To do this, Doctors of BC has created an information hub in the form of the microsite OpenMindBC.ca.

We will be promoting the site through various avenues, including posters designed by youth (sent to GP clinics across BC).

By enabling young adults to use existing resources to take stock of their mental health, by encouraging physicians and patients to initiate conversations about mental well-being, and by providing an information hub to inform and empower youth and those caring for them, the Doctors of BC Youth Mental Health Project is taking action to make sure that our transition-age patients can take their best steps forward into the adult world.

—Lloyd Oppel, MD
Chair, Council on Health Promotion

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