

Gratitude—the Christmas gift that keeps on giving

Christmas morning . . . the most wonderful time of the year. It's 7 a.m. and I am awoken by my two kids urging me out of bed and into our matching moose-print onesies. "Teeth brushing later, Mom! Let's go, let's go!" they yell. Still in grade school, my kids are fully invested in the magic of the season. We search for signs of Santa's visit: Have the cookies been eaten? Carrots chewed by reindeer? And what of the presents? Some wrapping does not match the other gifts under the tree, a reliable sign those offerings have come from the North Pole. I watch my kids with a sense of overwhelming joy, coupled with smug satisfaction. I really nailed it. I must be mom of the year. For confirmation, one need look no further than Samukai, a rare Lego figure

that I sourced on Facebook. I had it shipped overnight after my son wrote an addendum to Santa, explaining why it was absolutely essential that his elves build this Lego king, as it was no longer available in stores.

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Christmas morning is going perfectly, until it isn't.

"That's it?" my kids ask. "No more presents?" Their excitement turns to dismay as they realize the gifting is over. "What will we *do* for the rest of the day?" they ask, beginning the process of comparing who got more and whose gifts are better. As the infighting starts, my joy turns to anger. Don't they know how lucky and privileged we are to even get presents? Then my anger subsides and a dark cloud of shame descends. I sit sullenly on the couch, sipping my tea and wallowing in the realization that I am a terrible parent who has failed to instill any sense of values in my kids. I imagine my future as a lonely old lady, deserted at Christmas because I raised entitled offspring who never learned the real meaning of the holiday.

Bad-parent shame can be gut-wrenching but also very motivating. Determined to be better this year, I turned to friends and colleagues to learn how others manifest gratitude. Interestingly, I got just as many responses about what *not* to do, as what *to* do. Many people advised against the impulse to force gratitude upon my children. Some colleagues recalled their own parents constantly "shoving it down their throats" and "piling on the guilt." This notion reminded me of Boxing Day brunch with my

dad and stepmother when I was 13; instead of the usual \$50 bill in an envelope, I got a generic thank-you card from the food bank accompanied by a tax receipt made out to my stepmother's business. Gratitude was not my predominant emotion that day.

At a colleague's recommendation, I listened to a podcast about *The Gifts of Imperfect Parenting* by Brené Brown.¹ Her book emphasizes that it's not just how we talk to our children; it's also how we talk to ourselves. In a culture of "more, more, more," we need to practise gratitude to avoid being swept up in the currents of commercialism.

I have come to appreciate that expressing gratitude forces me to slow down and share my happiness. Gratitude allows us to savor the good experiences and be more resilient during the challenging ones. The holidays are not a joyful time for everyone; December can be especially difficult for those who are dealing with depression, anxiety, or grief. But even in difficult times, experts suggest that gratitude can be an opportunity to acknowledge the good things. On days when gratitude seems impossible to conjure, remember that it can also apply to memories, past events, or even hopes for the future. It may seem contrived at first, but experienced practitioners assure us that the cognitive dissonance fades with routine.

As we head into the holiday season, I invite you to comment at www.bcmj.org and share your experience with gratitude. You never know who it might help! I have told my kids that they gave me the greatest gift of all last year—gratitude—and I use it every day. ■

—Caitlin Dunne, MD, FRCS

Reference

1. The Parenting Book Club. Ep 4 "The gifts of imperfect parenting" by Brene Brown—The importance of embracing our flaws to grow as a parent. The Parenting Book Club Podcast. Accessed 3 November 2022. <https://theparentingbookclub.com/the-gifts-of-imperfect-parenting-by-brene-brown-book-summary>.

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Decolonization: CPSBC retires the crowned lion

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II died on 8 September 2022, the same day the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC) surveyed the province's doctors on a proposed new logo. The decision to retire the colonial crest coincides with the closing of the Second Elizabethan Age. In 2021, the registrar explained: "Since its adoption in 1886, the College crest has been the official stamp used on all our communication and documentation. The College crest is a distinctively colonial symbol with a lion wearing a crown on its head while sitting on top of another crown, reflecting the royal coat of arms of the British monarchy and all of its rights. This year we will be undertaking a significant rebranding process, which includes replacing the crest with a new identifier that reflects our current-day values of inclusivity and accessibility to all British Columbians."

The coincidence of these two events marks an opportunity to examine medicine's colonial roots in BC. In March 1778, Royal Navy captain James Cook was greeted by the Nuu-chah-nulth people in the place currently known as Nootka Sound, setting the stage for British colonization of present-day BC. In little under a century, the enormous land mass now known as BC was claimed for the Crown, with small reserve tracts set aside for the Indigenous population, whose numbers declined rapidly in the face of colonization.

In recent years, the CPSBC has recognized the need to improve its relationship with the Indigenous population and the care provided by the province's doctors, retaining Stormy Lake Consulting to assist in the rebranding process. Stormy Lake distributed a questionnaire to physicians requesting feedback on the proposed new CPSBC logo. As its website states: "We live in a world of eroding trust. Brands are letting us down, facts are not constant, and social justice is having a moment. . . . As a result, trust has become the new currency. Marketing needs

to work through the channels of trust: experiences, community, individual advocates, and reliable products."

Can the CPSBC adopt new values, ensuring that physicians practise in a manner that is accessible, inclusive, and trust enhancing for Indigenous patients? Is substantive change possible in a body with a statutorily defined mandate to regulate a conservative profession firmly anchored in Western tradition?

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The CPSBC is a direct descendant of the Royal College of Physicians of London, established by King Henry VIII in 1514. Medicine as practised by BC's physicians today conforms to the Western medical model; academic physicians constantly refine the classification and treatment of illness based on data obtained via scientific study. Disease-focused Western medicine could hardly be more disparate, in both philosophy and practice, from the traditional techniques employed by Indigenous healers prior to colonization. And perhaps not surprisingly, it has been unable to ensure that the health of the Indigenous population rises to that of other groups.

What of the proposed new logo? The CPSBC survey questions whether it may be problematic or offensive. Could anyone genuinely take offense at such an innocent array of blue rectangles and half-circles? Perhaps they should have asked whether the logo truly signifies a break with colonial tradition. For while

the regal lion and crowns are gone, the proposed logo consists of geometric figures not found in precolonial BC. They trace back to Euclidean geometry, a classical Greek discipline foundational to mathematics, relentless Western scientific progress, and ultimately colonization.

In fact, Western thinking is so ingrained that, in practice, it constitutes our only philosophical and political frame of reference for resolving issues of social justice. The notion that past harms against Indigenous people should be atoned for reflects an intrinsically Western, Judeo-Christian world view. Such harms are now being acknowledged and rectified through Western means: following years of litigation, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized Aboriginal land title in the landmark 1997 decision *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*.

Change at the CPSBC is managed as it is in other Western institutions. Consensus has emerged that the medical profession and its regulator have failed Indigenous patients and that this wrong must be righted and the brand revised. With the problem identified, the issue has been outsourced to recognized experts in the field. In its own words, Stormy Lake Consulting is "a world-class strategy firm that uses research, facilitation, consultation, deep analysis, and insightful synthesis to bring sense-making strategic solutions to clients. In short, we turn 'complex' into 'clear, compelling and useful.'"

The CPSBC will certainly rebrand, but can it truly "decolonize"—that is, discard the Western colonial mindset that governs its every action? Readers are invited to review a final quote from the Stormy Lake website to reach their own conclusion: "Strategy needs to identify . . . rational milestones and emotional states, matching the product to the moment, identifying the tools and information stakeholders use at each stage, and constantly updating itself as more information about the customer's journey is learned." ■

—David J. Esler, MD