



MANITOBA INSTITUTE  
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

## Make It Personal: Interview Series

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### An Interview with Dr. Ian Whetter

Dr. Ian Whetter, a family physician, wants patient safety to be thought of broadly and considered in every patient interaction. Not only is patient safety about preventing poor outcomes like mortality, falls and injuries, but it is also about cultural safety. “A major safety concern for Indigenous patients is exposure to racism in the health care system. I try to keep in mind every day that racism is a significant deterrent for indigenous patients seeking healthcare. This is a well-founded fear -we need to do whatever we can to enhance the safety of Indigenous populations in the health system.”



Ian believes that to improve patient safety for all Manitobans, we need to go beyond the principle of ‘do no harm’, and promote a culture shift, both in direct patient care, and at institutional levels. He believes physicians can be key change agents in this shift.

### Create Opportunities to Learn From Mistakes

Ian thinks that a commitment from healthcare professionals to learn from errors would make a big difference to patient safety. “We need to be transparent with everything we do. We need to have a degree of humility and look at when we screw up and learn from those experiences.” He encourages physicians to participate in patient safety rounds or meetings in their workplaces. “Physicians are often under-represented at these meetings, so we need to improve our participation. We need to be enthusiastic about reviewing errors. There is a lot of fear about acknowledging mistakes and we need to change this. This is an opportunity to be leaders in making something positive come out of errors.”

Ian also thinks that healthcare professionals can take a lead in eliminating systemic racism in health care. “We need to create an environment where there is no retribution for feedback. Just as I would be thankful if you pointed out to me that I was about to double dose someone with



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potassium chloride, I need to be thankful if you point out to me that I may be making decisions based on stereotypes that could cause harm.”

### **Breaking Down Systemic Barriers to Care**

Something that is important in Ian’s daily practice with Indigenous and other under-served populations is identifying ways that the healthcare system creates barriers for patients to access care, and then eliminating these barriers. Ian says, “We can anticipate where our patients might fall into gaps in the healthcare system, and do what we can to bridge those gaps to make sure patients move smoothly between professions, facilities and communities.”

To illustrate this point, Ian tells a story of a patient who wanted to return to his home fly-in remote community, but still required some medical care. “Sometimes we think that it is too complicated or cumbersome to facilitate discharge to remote communities, so for safety we keep patients in Winnipeg. But we need to acknowledge that there is a patient safety risk in disconnecting people from their families, communities, the land and the kinds of foods they want to be eating, and that kind of thing. Patient safety is also about giving patients the best possible care close to home.” Ian worked with the nurse, physician and pharmacist in the patient’s community prior to his discharge from a Winnipeg hospital to make sure that the patient’s medical care needs could be met in his home community, and ensure a safe transfer of care.

### **It’s Safe to Ask**

Ian encourages patients to get involved in their care to help promote their own patient safety. When asked what they could do, Ian says, “Patients should ask lots of questions. The tools from Choosing Wisely and MIPS are very helpful. Patients should be able to question physicians about the choices we are making for them so that they understand these choices. However, this is a tall order to ask of patients if there is a culture where questions are not welcomed. As practitioners, we need to be thankful when people ask us questions, and see this as an opportunity for collaborative decision-making with our patients”.

*The Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation established in 2004 to promote and coordinate activities that improve patient safety and enhance quality healthcare in Manitoba.*

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