

Alberta Doctors' Digest

New Indigenous Health Committee seeks spiritual guidance

At a recent meeting of the Indigenous Health Committee (IHC), members participated in a smudging ceremony conducted by Elder Emil Durocher.

The committee had previously agreed that their efforts – in partnership with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, Primary Care Networks, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, Alberta's universities and others – to support, promote and operationalize the principles and commitments contained in the *AMA Policy Statement on Indigenous Health* should include building relationships with Indigenous community leaders and members.

“In the AMA Indigenous Health Policy, we say that in addition to collaborating with health system stakeholders to achieve improvements to access and quality of Indigenous health, we'll also facilitate dialogue, relationship building and knowledge sharing with Indigenous leadership and community leaders,” explains Committee Chair Dr. Cara Bablitz.

With its purpose as a ritual cleansing, where negative energy, feelings and emotions are lifted away; mind, body and spirit are healed; and energies are balanced, the smudging ceremony proved an appropriate and timely event to mark the beginning of the work of the IHC.

While presenting Elder Durocher with tobacco and a “print” (or prayer cloth), Dr. Bablitz requested that Elder Durocher inform the committee of the purpose of the smudging ceremony and asked if he could “pray for guidance for the committee as it seeks to positively impact the well-being of Indigenous Albertans.”

For centuries many cultures have used smudging as a way to create a cleansing smoke bath that is used to purify the body, aura, energy, ceremonial/ritual space or any other space and personal articles.

About the smudging ceremony

(information from website: [Aboriginal Multi-Media Society](#), Edmonton)

The smudging ceremony is a custom of Native American and other Indigenous cultures. For centuries many cultures have used smudging as a way to create a cleansing smoke bath that is used to purify the body, aura, energy, ceremonial/ritual space or any other space and personal articles.

The burning of various medicine plants to make a smudge or cleansing smoke is used by the majority of Native North American peoples. It is a ritual cleansing.

As the smoke rises, our prayers rise to the Spirit World where the Grandfathers and our Creator reside. Negative energy, feelings and emotions are lifted away. It is also used for healing of mind, body and spirit, as well as balancing energies.

Our Elders teach us that all ceremonies must be entered into or begun with good intent. Many of us use the smudge as a symbolic or ritual cleansing of mind, body, spirit and emotion. The smell of the burning medicines stimulates our brains to produce beta-endorphins, which are part of the normal healing process of our bodies.

It is customary to cleanse, (brush or wash the smoke) over our eyes, ears, mouth, hands, heart and body. Some people choose to brush it over their backs, to 'lighten their troubles.' It is customary to use matches to light the medicines, when available.

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