

October 9, 2020

TAHSN Statement on the Death of Joyce Echaquan

Last week, Joyce Echaquan recorded her shocking treatment during the last hours of her life. In response to pleas of pain, her symptoms were dismissed and she was subjected to racist language and behaviour by those whose job it was to care for her. Ms. Echaquan was a member of the Atikamekw Nation of Manawan; her family and community are now pleading for immediate action to address the neglect and blatant anti-Indigenous racism which she and many others have faced.

As current and future health care providers, educators, researchers, administrators, and leaders, we share the profound sadness of Ms. Echaquan’s family and decry the ongoing racism experienced by Indigenous people in healthcare. We also acknowledge that racism in health care similarly affects Black people. Individual actions by health care providers are a symptom of systemic racism. We know that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism towards patients, colleagues and learners occurs in our own institutions, and we are committed to its eradication.

We recognize the need to create sustainable structures that ensure meaningful accountability within our institutions when these incidents occur as well as consequences for those who perpetuate racism. Furthermore, we will expand anti-racist education in our learning, research and clinical spaces and focus on cultural safety for Black and Indigenous learners across our institutions. Lastly, we know that our work must be guided by Indigenous and Black communities—including individual learners, patients and community leaders - to determine the solutions that will improve both their health care and their wellbeing.

We are committed to deliberate and urgent action across the Toronto Academic Health Sciences Network (TAHSN). Over the next few months, the TAHSN Anti-Black and Anti-Indigenous Racism Steering Committee will bring forward recommendations for meaningful, action oriented initiatives that will advance the goal of ending racism in our institutions.

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About the Toronto Academic Health Science Network (TAHSN)

The Toronto Academic Health Science Network is comprised of the University of Toronto and 12 affiliated academic hospitals, each of which hold national and international standing as leaders in their particular fields.