

Examiner Column from Dr. Rosana Salvaterra, Medical Officer of Health Peterborough Public Health

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So Why Peterborough Public Health?

As someone who has changed her name recently, I can tell you that it's both an exciting and sometimes challenging process. While it can be laborious and may even raise a few eyebrows, reinventing oneself is also thrilling. When it is applied to an organization like public health, it forces you to clarify what's most important to you and those you serve. This is exactly the sentiment my colleagues and I experienced on June 1 when the Peterborough County-City Health Unit officially changed its name to Peterborough Public Health.

When we started the rebranding process last year, we were motivated to do so because of the confusion many residents have telling us apart from the various other components of our health system. People frequently assumed the health unit was part of the hospital, which is understandable when our former address was Hospital Drive. And more often than not, residents also didn't understand how public health differs from primary or acute care, that is, going to see your doctor or to the emergency department. It was not unusual for us to get calls or emails from community members who were unhappy about their recent health care experience, expecting that we would help fix it.

Public health is a tricky thing to brand because so much of our work happens behind the scenes. We're the ones inspecting all the food premises and teaching food handling safety to ensure the meals you are served won't get you sick. We're the ones keeping track of everyone's immunizations and following up on every reportable disease case to ensure infections don't spread. We're the ones who test your public beaches, inspect spas and tattoo salons, and check the fluoride levels in the water for the benefit of everyone's dental health. We're out there enforcing the laws preventing tobacco sales to minors, and encouraging the benefits of breastfeeding for mothers' and infants' health.

In essence, we look at health from a population perspective. We look at the environments and individual behaviours that affect health and strive to make them better for everyone. We use tools like government policies, standards and laws to improve everyone's health status or ensure their protection. When we looked at rebranding our organization, we knew we somehow had to capture these ideas.

We started by consulting with our staff to find out what makes them tick, and without hesitation they shared their passion for the work they do. They told us how much they value making a difference in the lives of our local residents, especially our most vulnerable populations. They definitely wanted to see a new brand that was more holistic and better captured the large scope of work they do.

Then we asked you, the public, what you thought about public health, and our name change. We were thrilled to receive more than 600 responses. We heard from many of you that, not only was there an appetite for change, but that the words "public health" should definitely be included in the new name.

The new brand that emerged from this engagement process will be officially unveiled on June 10, and I can't wait for you to see it. It beautifully reflects the idea of how environments shape our health, and the diversity of the work we do. Symbolically it conveys the multiple layers of public health and is inspired by the organic shape of a medicine wheel to honour our long-standing relationships with Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations.

Please join us on June 10 at our Community Open House to see it for yourself, and to meet the amazing staff at Peterborough Public Health who empower the people of Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations, and the County and City of Peterborough with important tools and information to live healthier lives. We hope you will agree that the name change is a great fit for your local public health agency.

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