

## A day of quality that inspired

Inspirational is the word that could best describe the Health Quality Transformation conference recently held in Toronto.

From the spiritual inspiration delivered by opening keynote David Giuliano, a cancer patient, to the compelling call for organizational change from closing speaker Dr. Helen Bevan, the 2500 delegates at the meeting were presented with persuasive arguments to help develop an excellent health care system in Ontario.

In fact, even before the regular schedule began at the day-long Health Quality Ontario annual gathering, almost 100 patients and caregivers were getting their own inspirational pep talk from Bevan.

In between the plenary speakers, a packed agenda saw speakers and panelists discuss a wide range of topics dealing with the current quality agenda in Ontario, from better engaging patients to building a quality-driven culture.

And as if that was not sufficient to energize those committed to quality care in Ontario, delegates also heard Health Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins and deputy minister Dr. Bob Bell commend their efforts to bring transformative change to Ontario health care.

Substantive news from Health Quality Ontario was also not absent from the meeting as President and CEO Dr. Joshua Tepper announced a new initiative with the unveiling of [quality standards](#) to help address variations in three key areas of care – major depression, management of schizophrenia after hospital discharge and management of behavioral issues associated with dementia.

The three clinical standards made available at the conference are just the first that Health Quality Ontario plans on developing to raise the bar in improving care in the province in a way that targets both clinicians and patients with concise guidance to yield measurable results.

Tepper introduced the new clinical standards after opening the meeting by referring to it as “without doubt” the country’s largest conference focusing on quality health care. Noting that “better has no limit” when working to improve the quality of the health system, Tepper then introduced Giuliano.

Speaking to a capacity audience where delegates lined the back and sides of the room, Giuliano discussed his 20 years of dealing with what was eventually diagnosed as sarcoma on his forehead.

“My role is to share with you some perspective of what it is to be a patient,” said the Marathon, Ont. resident who talked about the various metaphors which have guided him during his life. He spent some time challenging the representation of cancer as an enemy that must be battled.

Challenging what he said is the tendency of our culture to treat suffering as something distinct, Giuliano said “suffering is as much a part of the human experience as joy, falling in love … and needing to go to the bathroom.”

“Cancer cells are part of me so to battle with my cancer it to be at battle with myself and that feels wrong,” he said.

Giuliano also discussed what he sees as the difference between cure and healing before ending to a standing ovation.

The inspiration from Giuliano was matched by the enthusiasm for change engendered by Bevan's presentation to close the conference.

Bevan has an international reputation as a proponent of disruptive and transformative change following her more than 20 years of leading large-scale change within the National Health Service in the U.K.

For those who had not had the opportunity to hear her before, Bevan's summary of the most recent research on how to effectively generate change within organizations and systems would come as a revelation as she presented evidence overturning traditional views of change.

Quoting authoritative sources, Bevan discussed how hierarchical structures and use of well-established mechanisms such as guidelines and toolkits are far less effective in bringing change than use of informal networks and platforms.

She noted that while hierarchical structures and "old power" are not going to disappear anytime soon in healthcare organizations, healthcare leaders must learn to make use of these new power structures and must also develop skills to work in a digital environment.

Spurred on explicitly by Bevan and using the #HQT2016 hashtag linked to the meeting, delegates and others engaged in an active discussion on Twitter about her ideas while her presentation was still underway.

In addition to these inspirational talks, delegates also received encouragement from those leading Ontario's health care system.

Health and Long-Term Care Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins attended the meeting to present the Minister's Medal Honouring Excellence in Health Quality and Safety.

In his remarks he acknowledged the conference's patient networking breakfast and the need to keep the focus on the patient when working to transform the health care system.

He also praised the work of Health Quality Ontario in developing the new quality standards. Next year's Health Quality Transformation conference will be held Oct. 24.

Judging from the positive remarks about this year's meeting that Tepper was receiving within hours of its completion, next year's conference is likely to be just as popular, so mark the date now.