

IDEAs – NSWOCC 44th Annual Conference

John Gregory IIWCC, ISWA

President at Opencity Inc

It is an understatement to say that I have attended a few wound, ostomy and continence conferences. How much is there left to say about different etiologies, products, or new technologies? Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence Canada (NSWOCC®) demonstrated that the conversations and learnings must continue. This 44th annual conference in Montréal, QC, Canada was enlightening. The conference theme, IDEAs [Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, shared – *Inclusivite, Diversite, Equite, Accessibilite, solidaire*] flowed seamlessly through a myriad of sessions. They are core beliefs of NSWOCC.

There are signs of a seismic shift in Canada as NSWOCs with light skin tones are now advocating for health inequity in skin assessment to rectify years of white supremacy. Rebecca Dyck highlighted how many assessment tools reference skin colour. “They always note it may appear differently in darker skin ... let’s change the *may*. It *does* appear differently in dark skin, and then we need to go beyond. How does it look different? We need to be specific,” says Dyck. Presenters are describing tools as biased, including pulse oximetry and the Apgar score. The familiar body mass index was designed on studies in a now obsolete racial classification. Such surrogate health markers fail to represent the diversity of global population. We need to recognize bias and stigma.

We agree that the skin is the largest organ in the body. Dr. Ray Samuriwo took us on a fascinating exploration of why the structure of the skin and its microbiome vary by different skin tones. Skin tone varies within cultures and even within families. “In terms of being honest about where we are and acknowledging the limitations of the system, we know that people with dark skin tones like mine often receive sub-optimal care, and this is often because they are underrepresented in skin ... and wound healing research for variety of different reasons,” said Dr. Samuriwo. We wonder what future implications this could have for products or technologies in the fields of wound, ostomy and continence.

Moderator Josh Moralejo thanked Lili Berescu and Priyanka Jani for their session – *Canadian Best Practice Recommenda-*

tions: Wound Care for People Who Use Drugs – A Harm Reduction Approach, concluding that we must “listen, acknowledge and respect the lived experiences of persons who use drugs, because as health care professionals here today, how can we provide individualized, holistic and sensitive care if we’re not going to be listening to our clients?”

Of course, there were awards recognizing the deserving leaders whose tireless work inspires the next generation. We applaud these role models. Listening to the spouse of the late Dr. Laura Teague accept the *Canadian Journal of Wound, Ostomy and Continence (CJWOC™)* manuscript award was a poignant moment. The manuscript was completed posthumously by Dr. Karen Campbell and acknowledged eight co-authors. Why do I pick out this individual award? Laura’s achievements and her husband’s vote of thanks epitomize the close-knit community and solidarity among the Canadian clinical community and, indeed, how united the industry is within it.

Again, as one who has attended many NSWOCC conferences, seeing the number of Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence (NSWOC®) and Skin Wellness Associate Nurse (SWAN™) graduates and the stage packed with members contributing to NSWOCC Board roles and initiatives is a testament to the exceptional growth. It signifies how that deep sense of community inspires emerging leaders in wound, ostomy and continence. A rightful acknowledgment is extended to the National Conference Planning Core Program committee for exemplary leadership and for creating a culture of open discussion at the conference and beyond. This all bodes well for a first-class WCET®/NSWOCC® 2026 Joint Congress in Vancouver, Canada in April 2026.

Well done, NSWOCC, on bringing an informative conference with the IDEAs theme that took us away from our comfort zone talking about etiologies, products and technologies and instead challenged our white supremacy, unconscious biases, pushed us to consider race, gender-affirming surgery, stigma, and harm reduction. It was refreshing and anything but the same old. ●