

They're Sacred Fires, not fire pits: A spatial case study on three, traditional healing spaces in Canada's largest and oldest mental health hospital

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Globally and historically, Indigenous healthcare has been rooted in land-based medicine derived from knowledge systems connected to the environment. Across Turtle Island, processes of dispossession have uprooted Traditional Healing practices replacing them with colonial, hospital-based care, now characterized as places of harm for Indigenous Peoples. The need for effective mental wellness services is higher than ever prompting many Canadian hospitals to take up Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) to redress harmful practices, including the addition of Traditional Healing Spaces (THS). Despite this response, there is a void of evidence about THS in hospitals, prompting us to ask: Can THS in hospital become places of healing instead of harm? By examining three, unique THS within Canada's largest mental health hospital, CAMH, research data from 22 interviews with hospital staff comprise a spatial case study describing what the THS look like, how they are used and what staff are saying about them. Framed theoretically by environmental repossession, findings identify the critical importance of designating Indigenous spaces that enable culturally affirming and wholistic health-care practice. Valuing Indigenous knowledge in hospitals by transforming spaces sparks curiosity, increases education, and enhances capacity for leaders to support reconciliation efforts.

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