



CEAN: The Impact of Patient & Public Involvement in Healthcare Planning & Decision Making

*Presented by Cassidy Jones, July 13, 2015
Community Engagement Advisory Network
Vancouver Coastal Health*

When I was asked to speak today about public engagement and Vancouver Coastal Health, my immediate response was an unequivocal yes. Yes, to sharing my experience with the Community Engagement Advisory Network, yes to providing you with a window into the successes and challenges we have faced and yes to continuing to shine a light on the impactful dialogue occurring right this very minute between the public and healthcare providers throughout the province. I became involved as a public advisor with Vancouver Coast Health following the hospitalization of my husband of 13 years for just over a month at Vancouver General Hospital. This life experience reignited a long standing passion within me for public health and medicine, and ultimately led me to leave behind a successful career in people and project management in the finance sector after over 8 years in order to pursue my life purpose as a surgeon. I expected to gain deep insight into the healthcare system in preparation for the career path that lay ahead, but what I could never have expected was the profound opportunity to affect positive patient and family centered care.

I have had the pleasure of joining the selection committee for the People First Awards, honoring the exemplary work of Vancouver Coast Health employees. The volume and quality of nominations was in a word: breathtaking. The passion, commitment and clinical expertise that these employees bring to work with them every day, results in lasting change in the lives of their patient's far beyond the four walls of their workplace. In all honesty, the greatest challenge I have faced as a public advisor has been finding enough time in my schedule to engage my skills and expertise in the way that most benefits the network.

The idea of patients as advisors in the development and redesigning of programs and materials that they intimately interact with, just simply makes sense. My message to all health care professionals, project managers, and clinical practice directors is also quite simple: get to know your end user and leverage their experience and expertise to use the best possible frameworks. This means providing a welcoming and interactive platform for the public to interact with a mutual understanding of what role each other plays. Above all, an acknowledgement that the sum of the parts is much greater than any one individual. This often means listening to a message or experience that may be hard to hear, or a suggestion that leads in a direction completely opposite the original plan. To this my advice is simple, it's much better to resolve these issues in the boardroom than it is down the line in an acute, outpatient or community setting.

I have seen first-hand the tremendous improvements that Vancouver Coast Health has made through community engagement and I am privileged to be a part of their team. If you are not already engaging the public in your planning and decision making processes, I urge you to free yourself of the burden of "getting into the mind of a patient or their family" and instead invite them to sit alongside you; I can guarantee once you turn the corner you will never look back.