



Address by Patrick Dion

Director of the Board of the Mental Health Commission

Ottawa Symposium on Mental Health

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Good morning my learned friends. Welcome to the Ottawa Symposium on Mental Health. This is one occasion when the expression ‘learned friends’ does actually describe the group, in fact would go as far as to say ‘very learned friends’.

My name is Patrick Dion and I am Ontario’s director of the board of the Mental Health Commission and the chair of this morning’s symposium on mental health.

I am very proud to stand before you as it is an auspicious day in Canada when we can gather together so many of our finest minds —researchers, academics, health-care practitioners and senior administrators— to exchange information and ideas on a subject that has gripped our country at many levels. Namely, the very critical, but long-overdue discussion of mental illness, mental wellness, its proper treatment, and the future research that needs to be undertaken before Canadians living with mental illness can expect to emerge fully from the shadows forever.

Upon reflecting on what I would say this morning I was struck that it was a little more than two years ago that I stood in this very place, in my capacity as a newly appointed director of the Board of the Mental Health Commission to introduce Dr. Austin Mardon who later that day would be installed to the Order of Canada for his work on improving the treatment of people living with schizophrenia.

And while the day was celebratory, it might not surprise you to learn that my thinking and expectations for the Commission were a far shade murkier than the clarity that we all share today. When I pause to think about the extraordinary progress we have made in two short years, thanks to many talented people who have worked so very hard to advance and to support the Commission’s work, it makes me proud to be part of a transformation that will improve the well-being of too many Canadians to easily count.

While it is true the Commission's current success is the result of persons too various to name, I am delighted that a good many are here this morning. My colleagues Louise Bradley and Dr. Howard Chodos, both of whom I will properly introduce in a moment, as well as Marie-France Rivard, Dr. Simon Davidson, and Lisa Biringer, as well as all of you, are to be applauded for your efforts to help realize the dream of the 1 in 5 Canadians who ask only that their broken minds be treated no differently than their broken bones, or their ailing organs, or their chronic illnesses. We are at no ordinary moment in Canada's history. Doing the right thing now will ensure that our children and our children's children can expect more thoughtful treatment than my brother Peter or Mike Kirby's sister or any of you who have suffered a mental illness.

And while these are powerful words, when coupled with equally powerful actions we stand every chance to realize that vision. I believe that today's symposium takes us another step closer to realizing an ideal. Our half-day forum will double as a valuable opportunity for senior members of the Mental Health Commission and Ottawa's research and academic community to share ideas, update one another on our progress, as well as identify and develop key research linkages that will further our common purpose of improving the mental health and well-being of Canadians of all ages.

While research has earned important advances in our understanding of mental illness, greater collaboration between the Mental Health Commission and Ottawa's research and academic community will ensure that we go farther, faster. And we have no time to spare.

A wise man once said, "Each time a person stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice, that person sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. And those tiny ripples of hope from a million different centres of energy and daring build a current which can sweep down even the mightiest walls of injustice."

Those words were spoken by Bobby Kennedy in 1966 whose purpose then was to help end the injustice of racial inequality in South Africa. And while we stand here today —some 40 years later— to fight the injustice of another inequality, namely the stigma faced by the men and women who are living with a mental illness, I believe that the sentiment and the purpose of today's symposium is no less relevant. As much as research is empirical and in most all instances exact, creating hope, while sometimes intangible, is an everlasting task for us all.

I encourage each of this morning's presenters and to all attendees of the symposium to be provocative, informative, but most importantly curious. Our collective curiosity will all but guarantee not only the success of today's symposium but the larger research agenda that awaits us all.

Thank you.