



**Pacific  
Pain  
Forum**

# BEYOND PAIN

## EMBRACING COMPASSION & TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



### Conference Program

SHERATON VANCOUVER WALL CENTRE

April 17, 2026

8:30-5:00 PDT

Reception to follow



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## Territorial Acknowledgement

The Pacific Pain Forum respectfully acknowledges that this gathering takes place on the traditional, unceded, ancestral territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>ə́yəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

We honour the enduring presence, rights, laws, and governance of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and express our gratitude for the opportunity to live, learn, and work on these lands.

As we convene to advance compassionate and trauma-informed pain care, we recognize the ongoing impacts of colonialism and systemic inequities on Indigenous health and wellbeing, and we affirm our shared responsibility to support culturally safe and equitable care.

# PPF 2026: Beyond Pain: Embracing Compassion & Trauma-Informed Care



This event is an Accredited Group Learning Activity (Section 1) as defined by the Maintenance of Certification program of The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and approved by the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society. You may claim a maximum of 6 hours (credits are automatically calculated).

## Learning Objectives:

- Describe the principles of trauma-informed and compassionate care and their relevance in improving outcomes for people living with pain.
- Recognize the impact of systemic, cultural, and social factors (including stigma and inequities) on the experiences of people living with pain.
- Identify practical strategies and interdisciplinary approaches that support safer, more inclusive, and person-centered pain care.

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## Registration Opens at 7:45 am April 17, 2026

Coffee, tea, juices, with a selection of pastries, cereal, granola, yogurt and seasonal fruit will be available at registration.

Feel free to bring your own reusable water bottle as water stations are available at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre.

## Program starts at 8:30 AM PDT


Keynote and Plenary sessions take place in the **Junior Ballroom**.

Breakout sessions are held in the **Junior Ballroom**, **Parksville Room**, or **Port McNeil Room**, as indicated in the agenda. Electronic maps are available on the conference floor to help you find your way.

## Quiet/Multipurpose Space:



The Port Hardy Room is designated as a quiet and multipurpose space for attendees who wish to take a break at any time during the conference.

 Session times may be subject to adjustments. We appreciate your understanding as we aim to stay on schedule.

### Location: Junior Ballroom

**8:30 - 8:45** **Welcome** with Fiona Dalton, President & CEO PHC, PJ Matras, CNS & Dr. Vishal Varshney

**8:45 - 9:00** **Opening Remarks** with Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Health, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

**9:00 - 9:40** **Opening Keynote**  
Richard Peter, Indigenous Peoples' Liaison

#### **Beyond Barriers: A Journey of Resilience, Leadership and Reconciliation**

Richard Peter, a proud member of the Cowichan Tribes, Paralympic athlete and multi-gold medalist, has spent his life breaking down barriers and championing inclusion for Indigenous peoples and those living with disabilities. With over 40 years of lived experience following a spinal cord injury and his work as the Indigenous Peoples' Liaison at the Praxis Spinal Cord Institute, Richard brings a powerful perspective on resilience, leadership, and change. In this inspiring session, he will share how personal experience, sport, and community can come together to make health care safer, more inclusive, and more responsive to Indigenous peoples' needs.

At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples living with disabilities and explain how these barriers affect access to safe, equitable health care.
- Describe culturally safe and respectful approaches that build trust, support empowerment, and improve health outcomes for Indigenous patients.

**9:45 - 10:25** **Concurrent workshops: Choose ONE**  
**Please note room to attend.**



See next page for choices

**9:45 - 10:25**



**Concurrent workshops: Choose ONE. Please note room to attend.**

Junior Ballroom	Parksville Room	Port McNeil Room
<p><b>Words, Actions, Impact: Bringing Trauma-Informed Care to Life</b></p> <p>Dr. Heather Fulton, Alli Heppell, RSW, Melanie McDonald, RSW, Julia Ott, RN Moderator: Tori Etheridge</p> <p>By the end of this session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the core principles of trauma-informed care (TIC) and explain why it matters in pain care across disciplines, including the impact of trauma on safety, trust, and engagement.</li> <li>• Demonstrate how TIC shows up in day-to-day practice by applying trauma-informed communication strategies (what we say / don't say), and identifying examples of both helpful and harmful approaches.</li> <li>• Integrate trauma-informed principles when working with patients and colleagues—using curiosity, compassion, and shared language to promote safer conversations, support tough team dynamics, and model trauma-informed leadership in systems.</li> </ul>	<p><b>From Surviving to Thriving: A Clinicians' Framework for Trauma Recovery</b></p> <p>Susan Reid Schellinck, OT</p> <p>By the end of this session participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key concepts in the neurobiology of trauma through a concise overview.</li> <li>• Describe the physical, cognitive, and emotional effects of trauma on the whole person.</li> <li>• Discuss a clinical framework to assess and treat individuals across varying stages of trauma readiness.</li> <li>• Demonstrate self-regulation strategies and other treatment options for trauma recovery.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ice, Ice, Therapy: Cryoneurolysis in Acute Pain Management</b></p> <p>Dr. Michael Jew</p> <p>By the end of this session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the history and development of cryoanalgesia.</li> <li>• Illustrate the physics and mechanisms of action underlying cryoneurolysis.</li> <li>• Discuss established and emerging applications of cryoneurolysis in acute pain management.</li> </ul>

**10:25 -10:50**



**Coffee Break - Enjoy a refreshment and visit our sponsor booths.**

Please return to the Junior Ballroom at **10:45**

Please return to the Junior Ballroom at **10:45**

**Location: Junior Ballroom**

**10:50 - 11:30**

**Community or Hospital: Finding the Best Place for Pain Care (Debate)**

Dr. Kshitij Chawla & Dr. Garry Palak

Moderator: Dr. Ainsley Sutherland

At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the approaches to pain assessment and management in community vs hospital settings
- Identify the challenges and limitations unique to managing pain in the community versus in a hospital environment.
- Evaluate the role of interdisciplinary care in effective pain management across settings, including the roles of nurses, pharmacists, pain specialists, and allied health professionals.
- Discuss strategies to ensure continuity of pain management.
- Recognize the importance of patient-centered care in pain management, including communication, shared decision-making, and addressing psychosocial aspects of pain.

**11:30 - 12:10**

**Trauma and Pain: An Intergenerational Problem with Structural Solutions**

Dr. Melanie Noel

At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:

- Describe how early-life trauma contributes to pain across the lifespan and generations, including key biological, psychological, and social mechanisms.
- Discuss how broader structural and socio-political adversities—particularly those experienced by minoritized and marginalized communities—shape trauma and pain experiences across different global contexts.
- Identify ways in which social support and validation can interrupt the intergenerational transmission of trauma-related pain, and outline strategies to strengthen these protective factors to promote resilience and recovery.

**12:10 - 1:00**



**Lunch - Enjoy lunch and visit our sponsors.**

Please return to the Junior Ballroom at **12:55**

Please return to the Junior Ballroom at **12:55**

### Location: Junior Ballroom

#### **1:00 - 1:40 Neurodivergence, Chronic Pain, and Hypermobility: Is there a Link?**

Dr. Amy Pearson

At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:

- Identify physical signs of hypermobility.
- Describe the link between chronic pain and each body system in hypermobility.
- Determine emerging research on the link between neurodivergent conditions (autism, ADHD, etc) and hypermobility spectrum disorders.

#### **1:40 - 2:20 A Pain in the Face**

Dr. Christopher Honey

At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:

- Describe the key clinical features and diagnostic criteria for trigeminal neuralgia (TN).
- Review current medical and surgical management options for TN, including indications and expected outcomes.
- Identify common differential diagnoses for facial pain and distinguish how they differ from TN in presentation.

#### **2:25- 3:05 Concurrent workshops: Choose ONE Please note room to attend.**



See next page for choices

2:25 - 3:05



**Concurrent workshops: Choose ONE. Please note room to attend.**

Junior Ballroom	Parksville Room	Port McNeil Room
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>From Trauma to Transformation: Rethinking Chronic Pain Through the Lens of Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr. Devon Christie</p> <p>At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the shared neurobiological and psychosocial mechanisms underlying trauma and chronic pain, including sensitization, predictive processing/avoidance, and disrupted interoception.</li> <li>• Describe how psychedelic-assisted therapies (e.g., MDMA- and ketamine-assisted therapy) may influence trauma-pain circuits through mechanisms of neuroplasticity, emotional processing, and systems-level reorganization.</li> <li>• Illustrate a trauma-informed, biopsychosocial framework to chronic pain care that integrates neuroscience, psychotherapy, and somatic approaches to support adaptive healing and resilience.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Understanding Trauma Through a Psychodynamic Lens</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr. Thea Gilks</p> <p>At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illustrate mechanisms by which childhood adversity impacts the development of personality structure and coping style.</li> <li>• Discuss links between psychological trauma and the experience of chronic pain.</li> <li>• Examine the role of unconscious phenomena in clinical encounters</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Safety and Co-Regulation: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Pain</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sarah Hearne, PT, Sarah Buddingh-Smith, PT</p> <p>At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how trauma and chronic stress influence the nervous system, shaping pain perception and protective responses.</li> <li>• Identify key elements that contribute to a sense of safety in clinical environments</li> <li>• Illustrate trauma-informed strategies that foster safety, trust, and co-regulation within the therapeutic relationship.</li> </ul>

3:05 - 3:35



**Coffee Break - Enjoy a refreshment and visit our sponsor booths.**

**Please return to the Junior Ballroom at 3:30**

Please return to the Junior Ballroom at 3:30

## Location: Junior Ballroom

### 4th Annual Dr. William McDonald Keynote Presentation:

3:35-4:50

#### Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture

Based on *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture*

Dr. Gabor Maté

Half of North American adults suffer from chronic illness - a fact Western medicine views largely in terms of individual predispositions and habits.

Western medicine imposes two separations, neither tenable scientifically. First, it separates mind from the body, largely assuming that most chronic illnesses have nothing to do with people's emotional and psychological experiences. And yet, a large and irrefutable body of research has clearly shown that physiologic and behavioural functioning of human beings can be understood only if we integrate our body functions with those of the mind: functions such as awareness, emotions, our interpretations of and responses to events, and our relationships with other people. Second, Western practice views people's health as separate from the social environment, ignoring social determinants of health such as class, gender, economic status, and race. Such factors, in reality, are more important influences on health and longevity than individual predispositions and personal factors such as genes, cholesterol levels, blood pressure and so on.

This talk shows how a society dedicated to material pursuits rather than genuine human needs and spiritual values stresses its members, undermines healthy child development and dooms many to chronic illness, from diabetes to heart disease, from autoimmune conditions to cancer.

At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:

- Identify two separations imposed by Western Medicine on the health and well-being of the population
- Determine three chronic conditions that are correlated with stressful social environments
- Describe one shift in focus that would support a healthier population.

**4:50 - 5:00 Closing Remarks & Prize Draws** with PJ Matras & Dr. Vishal Varshney

**5:00- 6:00** Join us for a wine and hors d'oeuvre reception!

## Evaluation

Your feedback is **essential** in shaping our future conferences; please take a moment to share your thoughts through the conference evaluation form.

SCAN  
ME



Evaluation Link



[Or link here](#)

## Certificates

- **General Certificates of Attendance** will be emailed to all attendees by April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026.
- **For CAS accreditation certificates**
  - Please fill out the evaluation via the online portal or using the QR code. Once completed, you will be prompted to enter your name on the certificate. You will then be able to download your CPD certificate .



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**Sarah Buddingh Smith**

Sarah Buddingh Smith is a Physiotherapist and Lymphedema Therapist (CDT) at BC Cancer Vancouver. She treats inpatients and outpatients, both virtually and in person. Motivational interviewing and pain science education are cornerstones of her practice, and she works closely with the Pain & Symptom Management and Palliative Care team at BC Cancer. In her spare time, she runs the Cancer Rehabilitation Canada newsletter. She is passionate about improving the function and quality of life of those living with cancer.

**Dr. Kshitij Chawla**

Dr. Chawla is a Psychiatrist and Pain Medicine Specialist practicing in the Greater Vancouver Area. He completed medical school at Manipal University, residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Manitoba, and a Pain Medicine fellowship at the University of Ottawa. He holds FRCPC certifications in both specialties through the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

He is Co-Founder and Associate Medical Director of the Canadian Pain and Regenerative Institute (CPRI) and holds active privileges at the Pain Clinic at Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgery Centre and Surrey Memorial Hospital. His multidisciplinary and interventional practice focuses on spine, headache, neuropathic, post-surgical, cancer, and musculoskeletal pain, utilizing advanced fluoroscopy and ultrasound-guided procedures.

Dr. Chawla is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia and is deeply committed to medical education and mentorship. He serves as Division Head of Pain Medicine in the Fraser Health Authority and contributes nationally as a Royal College examiner and committee member for Pain Medicine. He also serves on the Board of Pain BC and as its liaison to Pain Canada, advocating for people living with chronic pain across regional, provincial, and national platforms.

**Dr. Devon Christie**

Dr. Devon Christie is a family physician and therapeutic counsellor specializing in chronic pain and mental health. She is Co-Founder and Medical Director of the Centre for Medicine Assisted Therapy in Vancouver, BC, and has more than eight years of experience supporting people with chronic pain using a biopsychosocial approach.

Devon served as Co-Investigator and Study Therapist for the MAPS Phase 3 clinical trial of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD. She published the first paper demonstrating that MDMA-assisted therapy can significantly reduce chronic pain in patients with PTSD, and she has since advanced a complex-systems model of pain that highlights the unique potential of psychedelic-assisted treatments.

Previously Senior Lead of Psychedelic Programs at Numinus (2020–2023), Devon also collaborated with Dr. Gabor Maté in facilitating plant medicine and trauma-healing retreats. She is certified in Functional Medicine, MBSR, Relational Somatic Therapy, and Internal Family Systems, and is the author of Integrative Somatic Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy.

Devon currently co-directs the Somatic Psychedelic Facilitator Certificate with the Embody Lab and teaches with several leading psychedelic therapy training programs. Her passion is advancing trauma-informed, integrative models of care that bridge traditional healing wisdom with contemporary medicine.

**Fiona Dalton, President and CEO Providence Health Care**



Fiona Dalton became President and Chief Executive Officer of Providence Health Care on April 23, 2018. Fiona holds a BA Honours in Human Sciences from The Queen's College, Oxford University. She received an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science from the University of Southampton in 2017.

Fiona has amassed over 27 years of increasingly senior health care experience, distinguishing herself as a values-based leader, cultivating ethical and progressive organizational cultures that put patients and residents first. Under her previous leadership as the CEO of University Hospital Southampton NHS (National Health Service) Foundation Trust in the United Kingdom, the NHS's Care Quality Commission ranked the hospital as "Good" overall and "Outstanding" in the "Well Led" category.

Fiona is passionate about improving patient outcomes and organizational performance by focusing on improving quality, safety, staff wellness, staff engagement, and fiscal and environmental stewardship. She is an ardent champion of enabling and spreading research and innovation—from ideas formulation to pilot-implementation to scaled-up commercialization—that have positive real-world impacts.

**Tori Etheridge**



Tori Etheridge, has experience spanning public healthcare, private practice, research, and healthcare leadership. As a clinical leader, she mentors multidisciplinary teams and emphasizes patient-centered care, trauma-informed practices, and cultural sensitivity. Past executive with the Pain Science Division of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, she facilitated knowledge translation initiatives and mentorship programs across Canada. She had a dual role in research as both editor and clinician, helping to bridge the gap between research and practice. Her leadership roles have seen successful integration of research, clinical practice, and operational policies, building clinics from the ground up through collaboration with multidisciplinary teams, researchers, physicians, stakeholders, academics, and professional organizations. Currently, Tori serves as the Provincial Clinical Lead of Initiatives and Innovation for Pain Care BC, where she leads the development of practice and policy to enhance patient care. She actively implements best practices, advises regional health authorities, and contributes to the program's strategic planning.

**Dr. Heather Fulton**



Dr. Heather Fulton, a Registered Psychologist and Director of Wayfinder Wellness Centre, works in the intersection of mental health and substance use health. A member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, she is also certified in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Seeking Safety (a treatment for trauma, substance use, or both), and Invitation to Change (an evidence-informed approach for family members to support loved ones with substance use challenges). She is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Adjunct Professor within the Departments of Psychiatry and Psychology at UBC.



**Dr. Thea Gilks**

Thea Gilks is a psychiatrist working out of the St Paul's Hospital ENT and Complex Pain Clinics. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor at UBC and an Associate Member of the UBC Department of Surgery. She provides neuropsychiatric care, using a psychodynamic approach. She has expertise in the management of somatization disorders, including functional pain syndromes.



**Sarah Hearne, Physiotherapist**

Sarah Hearne is a registered physiotherapist who graduated from SFU with a Bachelor's of Science in Kinesiology and then completed a Master's of Physical Therapy at UBC. She has attended many interdisciplinary pain conferences, internationally, and has taken further post-graduate courses in pain management, motivational interviewing, vestibular and concussion rehabilitation, manual therapy, acupuncture, and facial neuromuscular retraining. She currently works at the Transitional Pain Clinic at VGH after spending 4 years working at the SPH Complex Pain Clinic.



**Alli Heppell, Social Work Clinical Specialist**

Alli has an MSW from the University of Toronto (2014) and since moving to Vancouver in 2017 she has worked across both hospital and community-based programming, primarily in the areas of mental health and substance use. She was the Social Worker for SPH's Urban Health Unit for 2.5 years and completed the BCCSU Addiction Social Work Fellowship (2024/25) before moving into a new position with the Perinatal Substance Use Team. She is passionate about trauma-informed practice, harm reduction, decolonial care, and advancing equitable access to healthcare for folks who use substances.



**Dr. Christopher Honey**

Dr. Christopher Honey is Professor and Head of the Division of Neurosurgery at the University of British Columbia. A Rhodes Scholar, he trained in neurosurgery in Vancouver and later at Harvard, with certification from both the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the American Board of Neurological Surgeons.

His research focuses on movement disorders and pain, leading the first trial of DBS for spasmodic dysphonia and identifying new syndromes such as HeLPS and VANCOUVER. He has held leadership roles including President of the Canadian Neuromodulation Society, the British Columbia Section of Neurosurgeons, and the World Neurosurgical Federation for Cranial Nerve Disorders.

Dr. Honey has delivered over 200 invited lectures worldwide, trained 25 neurosurgeons through fellowship in Vancouver, and provided humanitarian neurosurgery in countries including Liberia and Ghana. He continues to serve as Neurological Director for the Canadian Football League Players Association



**Dr. Michael Jew**

Dr. Michael Jew is a consultant Anesthesiologist at Providence Health Care and Clinical Assistant Professor with UBC. Born and raised in Burnaby, he completed medical school and residency training at UBC. He received grants from the BC Ministry of Health Innovation Pathway and the St. Paul's Foundation Enhanced Patient Care programs to support cryoneurolysis as an interventional analgesic adjunct to optimize care for trauma, surgical and palliative care patients.

His clinical interests include regional anesthesia, technology and innovation in medicine, critical care, medical education and informatics. He spends his free time sipping caffeine and chasing his energetic child outside.



**Melanie McDonald, MSW**

Melanie is Pain BC's Director of Support Services. She has a master's degree in social work with a background working in direct practice, leadership, and clinical supervision in a variety of settings including mental health, chronic pain, oncology, hospice, and community care. She has a passion for supporting program development and leading diverse teams to deliver high quality and trauma-informed services. She is an Adjunct Professor (Research) at the University of British Columbia Faculty of Social Work.



**Dr. Gabor Maté**

Gabor Maté (pronounced GAH-bor MAH-tay) is a retired physician who, after 20 years of family practice and palliative care experience, worked for over a decade in Vancouver's Downtown East Side with patients challenged by drug addiction and mental illness. The bestselling author of five books published in 43 languages, including the award-winning *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters With Addiction*, Gabor is an internationally renowned speaker highly sought after for his expertise on addiction, trauma, childhood development, and the relationship of stress and illness. For his ground-breaking medical work and writing he has been awarded the Order of Canada, his country's highest civilian distinction, and the Civic Merit Award from his hometown, Vancouver. His most recent book, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture* is a New York Times and international bestseller.

His next book, co-written with his son Daniel, will be *Hello Again: A Fresh Start for Parents and their Adult Children*, based on their popular workshop.

[www.drgabormate.com](http://www.drgabormate.com)



**PJ Matras, RN, Clinical Nurse Specialist**

PJ Matras, RN, MN is a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in Pain Management at Providence Health Care (PHC) and an Adjunct Professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Nursing. She brings over 34 years of diverse nursing experience to her role. PJ is deeply committed to enhancing patient outcomes and experiences in pain management. She serves as the co-chair for the Pacific Pain Forum planning committee, is a recent past executive member of the Clinical Nurse Specialist Association of British Columbia (CNSABC), and member of the Education Committee with Pain BC. PJ has a passion for advancing nursing practice, CNS service, and improving care for individuals experiencing pain.



**Dr. Melanie Noel**

Dr. Melanie Noel is Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Calgary and Director of the PEAK (Pain Education, Advocacy, Knowledge) Research Laboratory. Her internationally recognized research focuses on children's memories of pain, the intersections of pediatric chronic pain, trauma, and mental health, and the intergenerational transmission of pain. She has published over 240 peer-reviewed papers and developed influential models on pain memory and trauma-pain co-occurrence. Dr. Noel has received numerous national and international awards, including early career honors from IASP, the Canadian and American Pain Societies, and the Canadian Psychological Association. She holds the Killam Memorial Emerging Leader Chair (2021-2026) and is a member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars

**Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Health, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia**

Josie Osborne was first elected as the MLA for Mid Island-Pacific Rim in 2020.

Josie was appointed the Minister of Health in November 2024. She previously served as Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship and Minister Responsible for Fisheries, and most recently as Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation.

Josie grew up on Vancouver Island and has lived in Tofino for over 20 years, first moving there to work as a fisheries biologist for the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and later as executive director of an environmental education non-profit organization.

She was the Mayor of Tofino from 2013-2020, and also served as Chair and Vice-Chair for the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District. Josie also chaired the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional Hospital District for four years and sat on the Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network for six years. During her time in local government, Josie chaired the Tofino Housing Corporation and was a strong proponent for active transportation and regional transit. She has served as Chair of the Board for the Island Coastal Economic Trust, and in 2017, she was appointed by the BC Minister of Environment and Climate Change to the BC Clean Growth and Climate Action Advisory Council.



**Julia Ott, RN**

Julia Ott Bitter, RN, BScN, BA is a Registered Nurse and Clinical Coordinator with Fraser Health Authority's Community Pain Self-Management Program. With over a decade of experience and leadership across acute and community settings, she champions clinical and systems-level innovations in trauma-informed and strengths-based care.

Julia holds dual degrees in Nursing and Psychology from the University of British Columbia and is a Certified Holistic Nurse Coach and Consultant (CIINDE) with additional training in Pain Reprocessing Therapy. She founded Safe Space Healing, a private practice integrating holistic, evidence-informed approaches to pain, stress, and burnout. Julia is a member of the Association for the Treatment of Neuroplastic Symptoms and participates in grant-funded research on implementing the bio-psycho-social model of pain in community care.



**Dr. Garry Palak**

Dr. Palak is a Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation and Pain Medicine specialist. Dr. Palak completed his undergraduate studies in Kinesiology, his medical degree from University College Cork (Ireland), and his residency and sub-specialty fellowship at McMaster University. Dr. Palak's has been working as physiatrist and pain medicine specialist since 2019 at the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia Pain Clinic in Prince George and at the Initium Centre for Pain Medicine. The primary focus of his practice is musculoskeletal medicine and interventional axial spine pain management.

Dr. Palak is a clinical assistant professor in the department of medicine at UBC and is involved in teaching at the medical student, resident, and fellow levels. In addition, Dr. Palak is the medical lead for rehabilitation services in the Northern Health Authority and Provincial Medical Director of Pain Care BC.

Dr. Palak's clinic interests include sports medicine, spasticity management, interventional pain medicine procedures, and regenerative therapies.



**Dr. Amy Pearson**

Amy Pearson, MD, FASA is a board certified anesthesiologist and interventional pain physician at Aurora Advocate Healthcare in Milwaukee. She completed her Anesthesiology Residency and Pain Fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She is the Anesthesia Patient Safety Foundation's Director of Digital Strategy and has been their social media manager since 2018.

Dr. Pearson has published over 30 articles on topics such as interventional cancer pain management, peripheral nerve and spinal cord stimulation, integrative medicine, and socioeconomic influences on access to pain care. She is a past president of Women in Anesthesiology and was the American Society of Regional Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine (ASRA) 2022 Fall Annual Meeting Chair. She continues to serve as meeting faculty nationally and internationally.

**Richard Peter**

Richard Peter is a proud member of the Cowichan Tribes on Vancouver Island. He joined Praxis Spinal Cord Institute as the Indigenous Peoples' Liaison in 2019. With over 40 years of lived experience with a T10, AIS-B spinal cord injury (SCI), Richard has extensive connections through his longstanding involvement within the Indigenous and SCI communities.

As a Paralympic athlete and a multi-gold medalist, Richard has successfully represented Canada in multiple sports at multiple events worldwide. He is a member of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame and a two-time recipient of the Tom Longboat Award for Indigenous Athletes. He has shared his wealth of experience and knowledge to provide peer-support to others living with SCI. His lifelong passion is to support and promote the growth of Indigenous awareness, empowerment and quality of life.

As the Indigenous Peoples' Liaison, Richard works to enhance collaboration between researchers, healthcare systems, and Indigenous peoples living with SCI to improve the quality of life of people in every community provincially, nationally and globally.

Richard has specific research interests in: Indigenous engagement and health equity, sport and recreation, mobility, aging with SCI, urinary health and spasticity. Richard and Praxis are committed to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action by partnering with Indigenous populations to answer important questions from the Indigenous community.

**Susan Reid-Schellinck, Occupation Therapist**

Susan Reid-Schellinck is an Occupational Therapist specializing in chronic pain management. She is clinical faculty for Pain BC and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, and lectures annually for UBC's MScOT and Pharmacy programs.

Susan's work includes serving as a subject matter expert for Pain BC, mentoring with the BC Adapted Mentor Network, and acting as Chronic Pain Champion for the National Forum for SUAP. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Pain Management.





**Dr. Ainsley Sutherland**

Dr. Sutherland obtained her PhD in Experimental Medicine at UBC examining genetic susceptibility to severe infections and sepsis in critically ill patients. She completed her residency in Anesthesiology at the University of Toronto and a fellowship in Transitional and Chronic Pain at Toronto General Hospital. Her area of expertise is the prevention of chronic pain and opioid use in post-surgical patients. She is the Physician Lead for the Acute Pain Service, the Co-Physician Lead for the Transitional Pain Clinic at St. Paul's Hospital and the interim Vancouver Coastal Health/Providence Health Care Regional Pain Lead.



**Dr. Vishal Varshney**

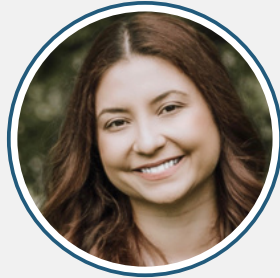
Dr. Vishal Varshney is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the UBC Department of Anesthesiology, Pharmacology & Therapeutics, an Anesthesiologist and Pain Physician at St. Paul's Hospital and Physician Lead, Inspiring People and Teams Pillar for Providence Health Care. He completed medical school from the University of Calgary, and his residency in anesthesiology at the University of British Columbia. He completed his fellowship in Pain Medicine at the University of Calgary, being one of the first physicians certified in Pain Medicine by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in western Canada. He has an interest in neuromodulation and medical education, serving as former Chief Technology Officer of the North American Neuromodulation Society Resident and Fellow Section. Dr. Varshney is the physician lead/ co-chair for the Pacific Pain Forum Planning Committee.

# Thank you to our Planning Committee & Volunteers!

If you have any questions, please find one of our planning committee members wearing a **red lanyard**.



*Lana Andric*



*Vicky Davis*



*Sonia Dhillon*



*Kathleen Duddy*



*Tori Etheridge*



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