

# University of Ottawa welcomes prospective students to Aboriginal Medicine Program

## Annual Mini-Med days offer learning, orientation and encouragement

by Greg Macdougall  
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This Saturday, February 21, Aboriginal high school students will participate in the Mini Medical program put on by the Aboriginal Program of the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine.

The day-long offering orients students and equips them in the preparation needed to apply for the Doctor of Medicine (MD) program, and is named ‘Come Walk in Our Moccasins’.

This is the sixth year of these Mini-Med days – one day for students still in high school (planned to expand to younger students in coming years), and another for post-secondary students and adults.

“I think it’s a great opportunity to get Aboriginal students to get a feel for medicine, to determine if they like it or not, and promote them to apply. To inspire them – it makes them think that it’s not unachievable, that it is something that you can do,” says Kara Kakekagumick, a second-year

University of Ottawa medical student from Sioux Lookout, Ontario and a member of Sandy Lake First Nation. She only began

to envision herself actually becoming a doctor after finishing her first year of undergraduate university, and now aims to practise rural family medicine in her hometown area.

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She is part of the Aboriginal Health Interest Group (AHIG) at the med school, a student-run group that organizes various cultural and educational activities throughout the school year open to all medical students. Group members help put on the Mini-Med program, in partnership with the Aboriginal Program and other medical student volunteers.

Another member of AHIG is Chelsey Ladouceur, a member of Sagamok First Nation. She is interested in pursuing family medicine and/or internal medicine, particularly oncology. Ladouceur is a first-year medical student, and is living away from her home of Sudbury area for the first time.

This has brought many changes to her life – “I’m not going to lie, it’s been tough” – but the activities and support offered both by the Aboriginal Program director and staff along with the Aboriginal Health Interest Group have helped connect her with a sense of community and mentorship. That, the time off provided



Mini-Med participants Keenon Diabo (left) and Alexa Lesperance (right) practising casting on a volunteer UofOttawa medical student. *Photo credit: Lisa Abel*

in the school schedule, and finding a good group of friends in her class, have all helped with the transition.

The Aboriginal Program of the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine was started in 2005; it celebrates its tenth anniversary this coming fall, with 30 Aboriginal graduates over this time. It features a dedicated admission process for Aboriginal applicants, with seven reserved spots per year, and there are currently 20 Aboriginal students in various stages of the four-year program.

The MD program – for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike – consists of two years of ‘pre-clerkship’, which is fully an academic class setting, and then two years of clerkship, which includes clinical training in various

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medical practise settings. Following graduation, students then have between 2-7 years of residency plus additional exams in order to get a full license to practise medicine.

Dr. Darlene Kitty graduated from the MD program in 2002, as the only Aboriginal student in the school in a time before there was an Aboriginal Program. She is from

Chisasibi Cree Nation, on the edge of James Bay in northern Quebec, and after getting her license, returned there to practise family medicine. She also serves in temporary placements doing emergency and in-patient work in northeastern Ontario communities, and is the current president of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada.

In 2010, she returned to the University of Ottawa as the Director of the Aboriginal Program, coming full circle. She spoke to the Mini-Med attendees (*see video below*) about her experiences before, during, and since being a medical student at the university. She shared her story on how she applied

a few times before finally being accepted into the UOttawa MD program, and persevering to achieve her dream of becoming a physician.

“Hearing from Dr. Kitty, and the student stories, and hearing the amount of times that sometimes people failed, but that never deterred them, that was really inspiring to hear and learn about, and I think that’s what kind of refuelled the fire a bit,” commented attendee Alexa

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— Art White-Sateana

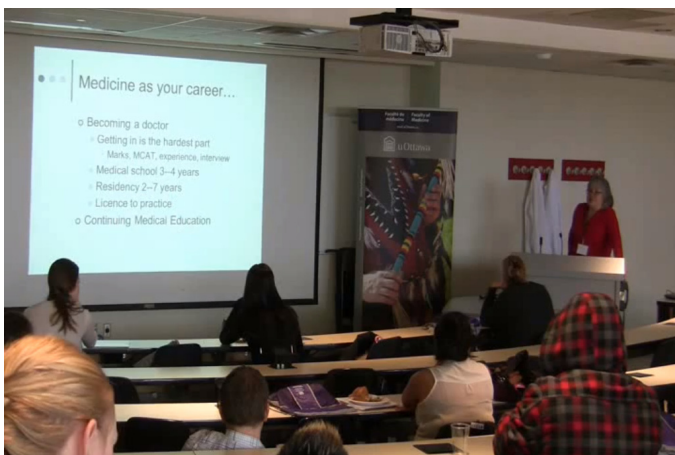
Lesperance, a third-year undergraduate Carleton University student from Naotkamegwanning First Nation. She plans on applying to medical school in a year or so, and was encouraged to hear how the program is made welcoming and accessible for students.

Art White-Sateana was another attendee. This past fall, he moved from Rankin Inlet, Nunavut to attend the Nunavut Sivuniksavut college program for Inuit youth in Ottawa. When he was five, he’d written “I’m going to become a doctor” on a piece of paper that he still has. At the Mini-Med, he learned “the process is really hard, but after you get in there, you just have a huge amount of

support. And I’m more excited to go to med school now than I ever was.”

“I learned a lot today about the application process, because I didn’t expect it to be that much, and I didn’t think that they’d put so much weight on the whole personality aspect of it – all the extra-curricular activities and the volunteer time,” said Keenon Diabo of Kitigan Zibi First Nation, who has just started studies at Heritage College in Gatineau. He was referring to the presentation on how to apply to medical school and the application requirements, which include three years of undergraduate university study combined with some specific course credits. He was also motivated by hearing the “pure determination” of the med students and said he’s now going to have to “really step it up” in the next few years before applying.

His favourite part of the day was visiting the anatomy lab and seeing the cadavers. Other activities included hands-on lessons in suturing and casting, as well as a lecture on the human body system and a case-based learning activity. Algonquin elder Albert Dumont opened and closed the day, and the Aboriginal medical students led an end-of-day session answering any and all remaining questions the attendees had.



WATCH THE VIDEO ONLINE:

Aboriginal Program Director Dr. Darlene Kitty’s presentation to Mini-Med participants — 39 min, [youtu.be/Hk-1cQK6pvc](https://youtu.be/Hk-1cQK6pvc)

More information can be found on the Aboriginal Program’s website:

[www.med.uottawa.ca/aboriginalprogram](http://www.med.uottawa.ca/aboriginalprogram) or by contacting the Aboriginal Program Coordinator, Ms. Lisa Abel, by phone 613-562-5800 x8687 or email: [mdaborig@uottawa.ca](mailto:mdaborig@uottawa.ca)

*About the author: Greg Macdougall writes and does multi-media reporting based in Ottawa, unceded Algonquin territory. More of his work can be found online at [www.EquitableEducation.ca](http://www.EquitableEducation.ca)*