

In memoriam: Laura Taylor

I am deeply saddened to write about the loss of one of our community, Laura Taylor, a third year medical student at the Vancouver Fraser Medical Program. I knew Laura well and saw her passion for medicine, her intelligence, her fierce determination, and her persistent advocacy. She blazed a trail of change around meeting competencies while protecting her health. Our heartfelt condolences go out to her family, friends, colleagues, and hockey teammates.

Laura was drawn to follow in the medical footsteps of her grandfather, father, and older sister. The challenges of medical school were a perfect match for her brilliant mind and her caring heart. For more than half her life, Laura valiantly tried to overcome her long battle with the effects of depression, within the disease of bipolar disorder, but sadly the struggle finally took its toll. The family truly appreciates the compassionate care provided by numerous physicians over the years in Saskatoon, Prince George, Kelowna, and Vancouver.

Her legacy to us at the University of British Columbia (UBC) will be four-fold: accommodations considerations, research, stigma-reduction content in the curriculum, and a memorial fund.

Laura advocated for and developed accommodations with UBC Access & Diversity that would protect her health while allowing her to fulfill the competencies of the MD Undergraduate Program. This was groundbreaking for the UBC Faculty of Medicine and has set a framework for those who follow.

Part of her quest for betterment, both for her own situation and illness and for that of others dealing with mental illness, was to engage in research about mental illnesses. She was happy and proud to work with Dr. Todd Woodward in the Cognitive Neuroscience of Schizophrenia Lab, Department of Psychiatry, on research about schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Laura felt the burden of stigma associated with mental illness. She wanted to address and eliminate this stigma, but did not know how to tackle it herself. In her memory, her family is coordinating a country-wide campaign for stigma reduction. Her sister, Heather, will be working closely with us to include appropriate, evidence-based practices into our discussions with medical learners.

The UBC Faculty of Medicine, together with her family, has established a memorial fund in Laura's name with the goal of raising funds to address stigma issues associated with mental illness and to support other related mental health initiatives within the MD Undergraduate Program. For more information or to give in memory, please visit <http://memorial.supporting.ubc.ca/laura-taylor/>. Donations can also be made to the Canadian Mental Health Association, either nationally or locally: www.cmha.ca and www.cmha.ca/branch_locations/kelowna-branch/.

It is hard not to wonder and worry about the stresses and pressures of medical school, residency, and practice, and to consider how they might have impacted Laura and might impact each of us. It is all of our responsibilities to monitor and look after ourselves and each



other, not only in the legal jurisdiction of fitness-to-practice, but also in the more day-to-day maintenance of well-being and resilience. We will be thinking about ways to do this systemically within the Faculty of Medicine. Please think about ways to do this personally. You can contact your Student Affairs Assistant Dean or me directly with questions, ideas, comments, and concerns.

I appreciate the opportunity afforded to me by the University of British Columbia Medical Journal editors to write about Laura for this mental health focused issue. I have quoted extensively from the obituary written by her mother and thank her family for allowing me to do so. Please visit the memorial website to leave messages for her family.

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