



The Role of Colleges and Institutes in Health Innovation

Speech by: Deborah Gordon-El-Bihbety

President and CEO, Research Canada

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I would like to begin by telling you about my relationship with lifelong learning. In my view, the secret to innovation is lifelong learning. My area of research is health literacy. Not too long ago, Dr. Irv Rootman from the University of Victoria and I published a report on the state of health literacy in Canada and what we discovered-- and by the way still applies-- was that 48 per cent of adult Canadians have low literacy skills that fall below high school equivalency and affect their ability to function at work and in their personal lives. 17 per cent function at the lowest level, where individuals may, for example, be unable to read the dosage instructions on a medicine bottle.

If the goal of education is to make every Canadian “innovation ready”— ready to spot opportunities, imagine possibilities, discover new ideas, learn and grow, how are we to do this faced with this reality?

What was also very interesting about what we learned and what has stayed true is that Canada has a higher proportion of its population at the highest and lowest levels of literacy proficiency while European countries have more of their populations in the middle of the literacy proficiency scale. Why? Because

European countries have more of a culture of lifelong learning. Through such initiatives as work-based learning and apprenticeships these countries help to develop and improve literacy and numeracy skills among their citizens throughout their lifetimes.

Lifelong learning implies an ongoing and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge. It supports creativity, teaches flexibility and comfort with failure. It inspires all of us to be inclusive, responsive and more daring. In other words, it keeps us innovation ready.

In January of this year, Education Ministers meeting in the OECD to address the issue of lifelong learning, issued a press release in which they committed themselves to developing stronger supports for learning throughout life. Ministers accepted lifelong learning as the guiding principle for policy. In the release, they also stressed the intrinsic value of lifelong learning in developing the creative and adaptive capacity of individuals as well as in contributing to economic and social development and innovation.

The World Economic Forum summarizes the challenge neatly: “A new deal for lifelong learning is needed globally if we are to provide dynamic and inclusive lifelong learning systems to resolve both our immediate challenges and to create sustainable models for an innovative future.” The Economist states that lifelong learning is becoming an economic imperative because technological change--innovation-- demands stronger and more continuous connections between education and employment.

Colleges and institutes are uniquely positioned to support lifelong learning which leads to innovation because you are the institutions that stand closest to the crossroads of higher education and the real world, where Canadians need to apply a mix of technical knowledge, business acumen, and creativity to add value to firms and systems like the healthcare system whose imperative is to innovate. This complex talent mix requires knowledge and skills gleaned from both academic education and vocational training.

The only way to develop curriculum and instruction models that deliver this skill set to large numbers of Canadians is for business, health and education leaders

to build collaborations that leverage their combined knowledge of labor markets, health systems, skills, pedagogy, and students. Colleges and institutes stand at the forefront of these collaborations and partnerships and contribute profoundly to the cauldrons of innovation in communities across the country.

The Government of Canada's report, *In Canada: A Nation of Innovators* (June 2016) calls, in the name of innovation in all areas, for a national collaboration including the private sector, universities and colleges, the not-for-profit sector, social entrepreneurs and businesses owned and operated by Indigenous people. This collaborative approach--an approach colleges and institutes are already taking locally, nationally and internationally-- is essential because every sector of society must be mobilized for action.

In July 2015 Minister Ambrose, who was then our Minister of Health released a report entitled **UNLEASHING INNOVATION: Excellent Healthcare for Canada** Report of the Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation.

The Panel's conclusion was that positive changes in Canadian healthcare systems could be accelerated by mechanisms that challenge our propensity to reinvent the healthcare wheel, city by city, and region by region.

Stakeholders who participated in the consultation advised the Panel that the gridlock in Canadian healthcare could be meaningfully improved simply by finding better ways to spread and scale up all the innovative initiatives and programs that are currently working well, but have not been widely adopted.

The World Health Organization says strong networks and partnerships that enable access to decision-makers, funds, allies, and other supporters; a highly committed group of individuals to push innovation along and monitor implementation, are the keys to the success of scaling up efforts in healthcare innovation.

Based on these criteria, I would argue that colleges and institutes are well positioned to play a critical role in scaling up healthcare innovation. You are

investors in learning processes and learning communities and you build partnerships and networks that predicate change and innovation.

Learning processes for scaling up can be supported by a range of methods used in colleges and institutes including: mentorship, deliberate transfer of practices, capturing and sharing organizational or community culture, and shared reflection and evaluation practices.

The learning communities that colleges and institutes create help people to embody change. They both honour people's on-the-ground experience, and engage people to experience new possibilities. This enables new knowledge and approaches to be spread widely, and ensures that what is spread is valuable and relevant to the people affected.

Now, I am not saying that colleges and institutes alone can scale up healthcare innovation. Nothing short of a new approach and a commitment from provinces, territories and the federal government will get it done. Ambrose's

Panel posited that scaling-up can only occur with new federal investments, the adaptation of existing machinery, a commitment to a new culture of collaboration among jurisdictions, and a concerted national drive towards system reforms that integrate budgets, align incentives around quality and value, and sharpen provider accountabilities.

I think colleges and institutes in this country have a fundamental role to play in fostering this new approach from the bottom up capitalizing on the preparatory work you have done in getting ready our next generation of innovators and cultivating a culture of collaboration among different sectors throughout your country-wide college system. You are nimble, adaptable, flexible and can act faster than many other institutions.

As a lobbyist, I am excited about the possibility of telling the story of colleges and institutes and the perspective on healthcare innovation you bring to the table. It is an integrated approach, borne out of how you have always operated - embracing and sharing knowledge inclusively and broadly and letting it

transform learning into new careers and businesses and services that strengthen communities from the inside out. When we innovate, there have to be receptors. Colleges and institutes are on the ground and embedded in communities fostering adoption and adaptation. This is a unique place to be, and as a lobbyist I can tell you it is something you can sell to Ottawa.

I want to end thanking colleges and institutes for what you did for me. By day I work in science, but by night I write science fiction. I would have never discovered my proclivity for writing if not for the Creative Writing Continuing Education Program at Humber College where I studied under the mentorship of Canadian author, Richard Scrimger. Through the program, I discovered I had all of these stories in my head --stories that people who may not be interested in science may read and in the process learn about things like dark matter and immortal jelly fish while of course being able to count on the regular fare of a work of fiction: a torrid love affair and a nasty villain. I guess it's my effort to reinvent myself and to innovate, made possible by a college. So, I must thank you. And finally I must remind you that health innovation begins with people--people making other people innovation ready through a dedication to lifelong learning.

There is no sector doing this better than colleges and institutes. Claim your space on the health innovation playing field and get on with what you do best on any playing field: Innovate. Thank you.