

Debora:

Two episodes ago, Dr. Camp shared some of her work related to lung health in partnership with carriers, family services and First Nations communities in North Central Bridge, Columbia. And in this episode today, she decided to hand over the microphone to her graduate students at the U B C Pulmonary Rehabilitation Research Lab so that we can also reflect on our perspectives on being field researchers, engaging in community-based research, and also just sharing some of our experiences in terms of what our visits to the communities look like and how these experiences have enriched us as trainees. My name is Debora Petry-Moecke, and today me and my colleagues are gathered in our lab, which is located on the ancestral unceded and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Before we jump into the conversation, let's start with a round of introductions. So I am a physical therapist from Brazil, and I am completing a PhD degree in the rehabilitation sciences program at UBC. And my research topic is telehealth, physical therapy for indigenous people. And I'm particularly interested in learning more about the therapeutic relationships in the context of telehealth. Joining me today are my colleagues, Justin and Sunaina. Justin, would you like to introduce yourself? And then Sunaina can also introduce herself later.

Justin:

Sure. Thanks Deborah. It's nice to be recording this episode with both of you in a physical space. The very attentive listener might remember our voices from previous episodes. So just to introduce myself again, I am Justin Turner. I am a PhD student like Debora in the lab. And my background before doing this PhD under the supervision of Dr. Camp is as an occupational therapist. I also worked at the regional hospital in northern BC so I have some kind of like familiarity from having lived and worked in northern BC to the work that we do. And yeah, I'm really excited to, to have this discussion with, with both of you today.

Sunaina:

Yeah, thank you Debora, for the introduction. My name is Sunaina Chopra and I'm currently a master's student in the rehabilitation science program at UBC. I was born and raised here in Vancouver, but I have family ties to northern BC which led to my interest in wanting to explore physical activity experiences in rural and remote communities, specifically looking at the values, barriers and facilitators around physical activity. So I'm very grateful to be here and to have this conversation with all of you today.

Debora:

Awesome. Thank you everyone. So the three of us have been conducting research that involves engagement with indigenous communities and we traveled up north to visit these communities a few times together and also separately. So my first question is, what are some of the highlights of these trips for you?

Justin:

Yeah, so for me, I think I've gone up and, and by up I mean to north central BC. So it's a region of British Columbia, kind of between Prince George and Smithers. If people are familiar with the area or they wanna look it up on Google Maps, and I've gone up since the start of my PhD about five times. And I would say the biggest highlights have been maybe three highlights. One would be getting to know the communities themselves, the cultures, the landscape, the people that live there. Second would be getting to know all of my fellow lab mates better. And you know, one memory that really stands out to

me was we all stayed in this cabin on a lake together during one of our visits up north. And just getting to, in that kind of environment, see what people's personalities were like and that like a summer camp type of environment. You know, who, who went to bed early, who was staying up until 2:00 AM chatting Deborah.

Debora:

This was not my fault.

Justin:

Maybe, you know, how people handled like all the mosquitoes. It was really good, like from a team building kind of standpoint. And this happened after a couple years of, of being very virtual and you know, lots of zoom kind of meetings. And then that kind of leads into the third highlight that I would share, which is around, you know, each of us is working on a slightly different research project. But when we all travel up there together, we get to like bounce ideas off of one another. If at the end of the day we're driving back to our hotel or to our cabin maybe sharing about, oh, this, this kind of data collection thing I did, it didn't go so well. What do you guys think? What could have been better? So the, I would say it's all about like relationality. That's kind of my biggest highlight of, of this type of work.

Sunaina:

Yeah, I would definitely agree. I think my biggest highlight like yours Justin, was, you know, the ability to attend a lot of these health fair events up there in the communities, being welcomed into the community and working together with like-minded people to improve the health and wellbeing of the community was very meaningful. And I think one specific memory that really sticks out to me is at one of the health fair events, they opened up with a ceremony, with a smudging ceremony. And that was my first time ever being part of something like that. And so that was very memorable for me. And that whole day was just very cultural based and very moving. So for example, we got to speak with the community's medicine man who actually got to read our poems. And later in that day too, we got to hear a performance by Chari. And he has such a beautiful voice and knows beautiful drumming, and it was very powerful to be there in a very memorable moment for me.

Debora:

Absolutely. I, I definitely agree with you. Some of the things that I'll share are also from the same date. So, well, one of the many things that I've learned from during my years as a graduate student here is definitely the importance around importance of positionality, which is kind of situating yourself, including your identity or life history, experiences, values and so on. To kind of recognize your own implicit bias and how this may influence your research as a whole. So from building relationships with community members to interpreting your research findings. So the fact that I'm resilient means that it wasn't until about three years ago that I started my learning journey about the history of First Nations people in Canada. And I started taking a course on indigenous public health in Canada while I was still in Brazil. And then just reading a lot.

Debora:

I participated in the C S F S cultural safety training but being able to actually go to these communities getting to know these people, getting to hear their stories, to learn about their traditions, it's such a unique and invaluable experience. So if I was to choose one highlight for me I think when we went to one of the most remote communities I've been to we were driving on this logging road for more than

five hours and it was knowing, which by the way, it's something that I'm still not used to. So I'm always amazed by how beautiful everything looks like when, when it snows and it's all white. And we got to spend a couple of days there in this health fair event the same one that Sunna just mentioned. And the landscape was so beautiful by the lake with the mountains and the horizon and all the, the gatherings there were kind of in a sharing circle format.

Debora:

So we were all seated in this circle and sharing, we got to participate in as merging ceremony as it already mentioned, which I felt super honored to be part of for the first time. And I also just remember chatting with an elder who is a residential school survivor, and he was telling me all this so difficult but inspiring stories of his life. So yeah, I just felt very privileged to have come from so far away to another continent, another country to be able to get to know other cultures and have these kind of experiences.

Justin:

Hmm. Yeah. We've really gone up kind of in all the different seasons and it's a, it's a place where the summers are hot and the winters are very, very cold. Yeah. so you have to, you have to really pack for the weather

Debora:

Absolutely. and if, if I can share another just very brief experience, this was not of one of our trips up north but this was when we went to the Nanaimo conference actually. Okay. To participate in an indigenous conference about physical activity. So it was me, Dr. Camp and Ana, and we went canoeing in this traditional canoe. And I remember that at one point this person in charge ask us to close our eyes and just follow his instructions and, and then when we open our eyes, we were facing the shore and it was a beautiful sunny day and we even saw some seals swimming around. So yeah, it really, it was a really nice experience. So really to get to experience some of these things, it's what makes this this work so unique, I think.

Sunaina:

Yeah. That was a beautiful memory. I remember that day. It was so beautiful on the water. And just like you said, the person in charge, he was just telling us these stories while we were on the water about, you know, the past and how they used to canoe for miles and miles and hearing that at the same time, experiencing that, because again, it's different to hear these stories, but to actually be able to, you know, feel what it's like to canoe in these large canoes and work together as a team to accomplish the goal of trying to get back to the shore against these, you know, tides. It, it was very meaningful and a very good memory.

Debora:

Yeah. It really taught me about the importance of teamwork that day. Anything else you guys wanna share? If not, then I'll move on to the next question. And my next question would be, can you think about any surprises or any unexpected situations

Sunaina:

That happen during your visits? I think maybe Justin and I will tag him on this. I'll maybe start the first part of the story here if Justin wants to finish the rest. Oh, cool. I think he knows what I'm talking about. So we were at a health fair event and it was a two day event and it would, some of these events are

typically held outdoors. And I remember the first day, you know, it was moderately windy, you know, at these events we tend to have pamphlets and juice boxes and other things at our booth. And I remember we did have to kinda anchor some of the pamphlets so that they wouldn't fly away. But as the day progressed, you know, I did get a little bit windier and maybe we didn't anchor our canopy tent as well as we should have.

Sunaina:

And so at one point during the day, the wind gusts just picks up, picks up our tent, flips it over, and one of the legs just snaps. And it was just, oh my goodness. It was a big surprise to us. These are like tough metal legs too, like for it to snap in half like that, it was astonishing. And so the problem with this situation is that to collapse the canopy tent, all four legs have to come in and it's just impossible at that point with a bent leg. So we had to leave the tent there, we had to head back into town to a home hardware store, find, you know, tools to fix this canopy leg. And I remember feeling like such like a bob the builder that day, you know, thinking about, okay, I need an Allen key, I need a wrench, I need a Philip's head. I'm up and down these aisles of the home and hardware store. And, you know, we came back the next day, we collapsed the tent, put it back in the bag, and Justin can carry on the rest of that story.

Justin:

Yeah. I mean, I never knew you were such a tinkerer, Sunna true. Those, that that side of you really came out. I mean the, the only other thing I would add, I guess is that, you know, sometimes in life, like you have an experience and it's like, it happens quickly, but in slow motion at the same time. And when I, when I think back to like the canopy tent blowing over and we're like, oh no, there it goes. It it's one of those times. Yeah. and the other thing I would say is please don't ask us what happened with the Canopy tent after that.

Sunaina:

Do you have anything else Justin, you'd like to share in terms of unexpected experiences?

Justin:

You know, one of the, one of the things I, I wanted to talk about, and I wouldn't say this is necessarily a surprise or unexpected for me personally, but in this work we get to visit indigenous communities and the experience of getting to go there is one with like, so much joy and you get to see how beautiful the landscapes are. And there's lots of like, languages spoken in community and, and culture thriving and artwork. And this really, I think, runs counter to the types of narratives or the, maybe the types of visions that a lot of people have in their mind about indigenous communities. So I think, yeah, I just wanted to highlight, highlight that fact. For me personally something that I wasn't expecting was nervousness and anxiety about the specific research that I'm involved in.

Justin:

So I'm like a qualitative research researcher. I do interviews with people and at the start of my PhD I did most of those interviews over Zoom or over the phone. And then we switched to doing them in person. And I remember my first in-person interview, I, my hands were so shaky the paper where I was taking notes was like, was, was shaking. And I, I didn't anticipate having these feelings, like going into it, you know, you're, you're having a conversation with someone. But what I felt like was, as a researcher, I was actually under a microscope myself. Like the participant could see me fumbling with my interview guide.

And so that's something I in the subsequent in-person interviews had to learn to deal with, to take deep breaths and to be like really organized and prepared kind of going into it.

Debora:

Definitely, I can resonate with that as well. I also felt pretty nervous in my first in-person interview. Well, to me, I wouldn't say that again. It was unexpected. As we started to go up north more frequently, I realized that seeing wildlife is actually really common there. But there was this time it was just the three of us and we were, we took a ferry ride and then on the other side of the river there was no cell phone reception. And so we were kind of struggling to find the location of the health fair. We were supposed to shut attend. And as we seem to have found some houses, Justin was the one driving. And I remember he turned right and drove for like two minutes, literally. And then we saw a black bear right next to the road. And it was such an amazing experience. And I remember I was so surprised, especially about how close the bear was to the communities, to some of these households there. And, and the last time we were there as well, last month we were also fortunate enough to see a fox, deer, bunnies and another bear, which I think this time was a grizzly bear crossing the street

Justin:

Oh, wow. Yeah. Were you scared?

Debora:

No, because we were inside the car, so, but yeah, it was really big. And so that's, that was pretty cool. Yeah. Anything else you would like to share on this topic?

Sunaina:

No, I think, like you all said, like it's very cultural up there and it's beautiful. And I think the amount of photos I've taken up there since we've been up there, it's astonishing. Like my photo album is just full and I love bringing my Polaroid camera as well and capturing these moments again because it's just breathtaking up there. And I'm so fortunate to have that experience and let, as Justin said earlier, go up at all seasons, spring, summer, and a very early winter.

Debora:

True. Yeah. Serena has the most beautiful pictures of our, our trips there.

Justin:

Yeah. Tinker, photographer, researcher,

Debora:

Yeah. Multiple roles, multiple hats. Okay. moving on to the next section then. The next question would be, were there any challenging situations that you remember and what was it like to get through it? And maybe I can start this one. So the biggest challenge for me that I can think of was definitely the poor air quality due to the wildfire smoke the last time we were there, which was pretty recent. So we saw several fires on our, on our way there. Several places were where the vegetation was all burned. The visibility itself was quite limited. Some communities had been evacuated and we were kind of vigilant and we, for bags ready just in case we had to evacuate too. So I remember that just being outdoors for a couple of hours would give me a headache and like watery eyes, and we were just outdoors for very

short periods, periods of time. So it really made me reflect on how complicated it is to live in this, this situations, this areas where you may have to deal with that every day during some periods especially during summer season. So yeah, that was the most challenging thing that I've experienced, I think.

Justin:

Hmm. It's, it's interesting you raised the, you know, the wildfires in the smoke, that's like my kind of area of research in, in the lab with Dr camp. And so I've been talking to people who have had to be evacuated and live out of a hotel and have, you know, their summers really affected by days and weeks and months of, of poor air quality. Yeah. So that's, that's interesting. You, you had just a little bit of a, a taste of that. Yeah. and I think, you know, one of the challenges of, of doing research where we're based in one part of the province and, and we're going to another place is that there's, there's unexpected events like wildfires. There's, you know, maybe you plan to, to go and, and visit a specific community, but the day before all of your participants cancel, or there's a pandemic and, and you're not able to do a, you know, community visit type of research for, for two years at a time. So that's really, that's a big challenge and something that for me, and I think all of us, we've had to learn to be flexible. Absolutely. And to have like a, a backup plan.

Sunaina:

I hundred percent agree. Just that concepts of uncertainty and just being uncomfortable. Like you said, Deborah, you know, when we go up there up north, we do have to fly up there and we do have to stay in hotels sometimes for a week at a time. Like many of those affected by wildfires. It, it doesn't tend to be fun. It's not fun to stay at a hotel sometimes for a week. And accommodations there are limited. So you're limited to maybe one, maybe two motels, I would call them mostly. And, you know, you're leaving the comforts of your home, your routine, your friends, your family for a week at a time. And it can be uncomfortable. And, you know, when we go, we also do have to pack light because there's so many of us. So I tend to live outta my duffle bag, for example. And again, you can only fit so much in there, so you're also leaving a lot behind at home. Like many of those affected by welfare, again, just grabbing their things and going. So I would say that would be one of the most challenges I faced with field work is that it can be uncomfortable at times and not as glamorous as living in a hotel, as many of those assume.

Debora:

That's true. Another thing we have to dealt with in our last trip was a flat tire. So that was also unexpected and challenging. But I, I most definitely agree with you both with respect to having to be flexible. I think that that's one of the things that this kind of work kind of requires you.

Justin:

I just want to jump in- I, I did not hear this flat tire story.

Justin:

Can you tell me what, what happened with the, with the flat tire?

Debora:

I actually don't know exactly what happened. 'cause because people just resolved everything so quickly that time. I think it was because of the, the roads and I don't know. But we were fortunate enough to be just next to a what do you call that place?

Sunaina:

Like a tire shop? Yeah.

Debora:

Like a tire shop. Yeah. And so yeah, they fix it right away and, and a matter of minutes, probably less than an hour, we had everything good to go.

Justin:

Wow. All kinds of things that, you know, someone in just a, like when you think of a, a research lab and you're wearing a lab coat we have a whole set of different problems then, then what they would have to contend with.

Debora:

Yeah, true. Oh, another thing that I can remember actually is when we went there in February. So it was super cold, as you said right? You mentioned We, we have been there in different seasons. So February was cold and I got a cold, so we went to the supermarket and I bought some medicine and I even tasked for Covid. But thank God the, the results were negative. But the thing is that I was doing my interviews, I was wearing a mask and I was trying to be in a ventilated room. And then this gentleman was kind of kind enough to share some of his knowledge on traditional medicine with me. So he was like just sharing with me some of the things that I could do to help me feel better. And I felt so honored that he trusted me to share that knowledge, you know? So that was, that was another nice experience.

Justin:

Yeah. Yeah, real honor. You, you got to experience smudging and there's like a lot of positive effects of that, certainly mental health wise. And now you're learning some of the physical health.

Debora:

Yeah, absolutely.

Sunaina:

Yeah.

Debora:

And then my, my next question here is how do you feel like the lessons learned through all these experiences have enriched you as students?

Sunaina:

I think just to speak to an earlier point Justin made is just that idea of being flexible and problem solving. I think I've really learned, you know, how to harness those skills and really develop them further, you know, as like previous experiences we've mentioned, you know, with the tent and everything. But even just that uncertainty and being flexible about when things change on a dime. You know, if there's a

wildfire, if there's another community event happening, you know, you're not gonna have interviews that day and you're just going to have to find other things to do and make your time worthwhile up there, but at the same time, problem solve. So one example I can remember from our last trip that Dr. Camp didn't share in her last episode, but I will share now. So we were up north and we were installing these air quality sensors.

Sunaina:

And so we had two cars and two teams. And so we went together to speak with a gentleman about getting it set up, and then at which point we were going to divide and set up these sensors and go to different meetings. So again, as Debora mentioned, there's no signal in some of these areas. So as soon as we get back to our cars, half our team gets in one car and Dr. Camp and I are heading to our other car. The other car pulls away, at which point Dr. Camp realizes she doesn't have her keys. There's nobody else nearby. There's nobody else in this building. Dr. Camp is running after this car trying to stop it, but no luck. You know, we're trying to call them, text them, but again, there's like obviously no signal. So that's not working. And now just here it's kind of, you can tell where my age and Dr.

Sunaina:

Camp's age diverge a little bit in problem solving, dark cam's, walking around, looking for physical people trying to help us me. Well, I'm looking down on my phone trying to see what my phone can do to help us. So I'm thinking, I'm thinking, and when I realized that inside the community building, there's actually wifi. And so what I remember is that you can make wifi calls using the wifi connection. So luckily I connected to the wifi. I called the local health center that was nearby and told them what was happening. And very gratefully, someone was able to come pick us up stranded at this building. And again, it was very hot last month too. It was like 30 degree weather and the air quality was very poor. So being out there for too long wasn't very pleasant. So very grateful and, and for the generosity of the staff members there at the health center and for helping us stranded. But yeah, again, just that example really exemplifies how you need to problem solve very rapidly at those times. Absolutely, what about you, Justin?

Justin:

I guess what I would share is, I guess, you know, what, what has really been enriching about getting to do research in community and getting to work alongside all of you folks has been this sense of feeling like really connected to my research and really connected to some of the stories about, about wildfires and about the land and about culture. Like at a really embodied level, learning what it is like and, and listening to, you know, the songs that, that are important in these communities in some instances. Or getting to see how lands have been affected by, by forest fires getting to meet all of the wonderful folks that, that live in the communities. I think that really enriches the, the data that I've collected. And it sort of takes some stories that might be just two dimensional and makes them like three dimensional. It, it really adds color to my, my process as a researcher.

Debora:



Mm-Hmm. I agree. Definitely agree. And, and I would add on that maybe from my, my perspective I think one of the biggest lessons for me was just learning a totally different way of doing research from what I had experienced before. So research with indigenous people requires relationship building, right? I feel like we certainly wouldn't be able to just go there and participate in this community events and cultural activities if Dr. Kemp didn't have a long-term established relationship with carrier sick can and family services. It also helped me understand the true meaning of collaboration. So some of the things that you already said, just in, in terms of our own lab and our own team, but also engaging with community. So doing community-based participatory research is about this engagement and this relationship building process and just also about being accountable.

Debora:

So the fact that we try our best to report back and to get continuous feedback from C S F S S throughout the development of our research projects. This is something that also wasn't part of my, my previous experiences with research. And the fact that the more we get involved with the work and the people, I feel the more genuine is our intention to make a meaningful, meaningful impact in their lives, right? So it's not just about finishing our degrees or having something to write about, it's really about learning what's important to them and trying to find ways to support these communities, so to improve their health as Ana said before, and to, to try to address some of these inequities that they face. So yeah, this work can be really challenging at times but it's also absolutely rewarding and fulfilling. I, I feel and hopefully all this knowledge is also something that I'll be able to use in my future. Maybe in my home country, I dunno, to support indigenous people all over the world. Yeah.

Justin:

And, and the fact that all the work that we're doing, it's like, it's directed and, and led by carriers, county family services and it's like oriented towards what they want to find out and the improvements or, or changes that they want to enact. I think that's a, a big strength of the work that we do in our lab. Yeah,

Sunaina:

Yeah, for sure. And that accountability you mentioned, Deborah, I think is really important. Like, you know, I feel very privileged when I get accepted to share this work at sometimes, you know, provincial, national, and even international conferences. And I feel it an obligation to really share the stories and to stay true to what the communities have said and feel obliged to tell it how they would want me to share, you know, what do they want me to share, what are they hoping to gain from that? And when I get to share these conferences, it's always very powerful and very eye-opening to a lot of the audience, again, because they haven't been there, they don't know the experiences up there. So I just feel very honored and that accountability comes up time and time again at those conferences.

Debora:

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Sunaina:

I think like Debora and Justin, you know, the one-to-one interviews with participants has been really fulfilling and meaningful to me. You know, to sit down with these participants co-create these questions, go into community, meet potential participants and conduct those interviews is a big reason why I plan to continue with qualitative research. You know, I think if I was given these transcripts and not having done all of that myself, it wouldn't have been as meaningful to me and as fulfilling and likely why I

would've stayed maybe with quantitative research. But like, I just, like, just instead at the beginning, all of this experience with field work has really brought us together as a lab. You know, sharing meals, traveling in a car for extended periods, listening to music sightseeing when we have some downtime. Yeah. And so I'm very grateful for the experience and I think it's made us a family and I'll cherish those memories and time together.

Debora:

Yeah. That's so nice. Yeah. It's a great way to and the, the conversation. So thank you all for sharing your perspectives and a little bit of our experiences and thank you audience for listening to our discussion today. I hope that you enjoyed this episode, and please let us know if you have any comments. We would love to keep the conversation going. Bye for now.

Justin:

Bye

Sunaina:

Bye.