

## **Dr. Kevin Bezanson: Winner of the 2024 CSPCP Humanitarian Award**

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The Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP) is pleased to award the 2024 Humanitarian Award to Dr. Kevin Bezanson in recognition of his exceptional quality of care and advocacy serving people facing barriers to accessing care, especially palliative care.

Dr. Bezanson began his humanitarian work over 23 years ago, in his first position providing care to persons with lower income, vulnerably housed, immigrants and refugees, helping establish the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre from 2000-2002. Between 2000 and 2004, he provided palliative care services in acute, hospice, and community settings as a family physician, and was influential in the establishment of a 24/7 comprehensive care program for patients with palliative care needs. For the last 7 years, he has been a palliative care physician in the Thunder Bay Region, and an assistant professor at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

Nationally, Dr. Bezanson has provided care to underserved patients with palliative care needs and those at end of life. He believes in equitable access to care for people who are limited by their circumstances, environment and/or access to resources. He has also worked towards providing palliative care to Indigenous peoples. Since 2017, in the Thunder Bay catchment area, he has not only worked with his team to improve systems for improving clinical palliative care to Indigenous peoples but has also sought to improve quality of care in the area in the form of education. Dr. Bezanson contributed to the Learning Essential Approaches to Palliative Care (LEAP) Core – First Nations Enhanced Curriculum developed by the Centre for Education and Research on Aging and Health led by Holly Prince as a member of an advisory group. This work seeks to deliver LEAP foundational education in a way that is culturally appropriate and strengthens the skills of health care providers working in First Nations communities. He is also the Physician Lead for the Partnership Advisory Team for palliative care for the vulnerably housed, helping form the Palliative Advocacy and Care Team (PACT). Together they are linking care to those facing palliative issues and social vulnerabilities in Thunder Bay.

Dr. Bezanson began to share his expertise on the international stage over 20 years ago. From 2004 to 2006, he worked with Dignitas International as their first Medical Coordinator, and then as Head of Mission. During his tenure, he worked alongside the Ministry of Health in Malawi to develop hospital and district programs to ensure access to treatment, care, support for those living with HIV/AIDS in Zomba District. In subsequent years, especially 2009-12, he helped support formalizing and expanding palliative care services in Zomba.

From a research perspective, Dr. Bezanson sought out opportunities to support palliative care delivery integration in humanitarian efforts. Since 2016, he has been a member of the Humanitarian Health Ethics Research Group. They completed a large scale study looking at refugee settings in Rwanda and Jordan, natural disasters in several settings, and health emergencies with a focus on Ebola in Guinea. The study revealed gaps in palliative care provision and how to address them in crisis settings. Dr. Bezanson was also key to the research team's contributions to two chapters of A Field Manual for Palliative Care in Humanitarian Crises, and also to the Sphere Handbook. He is described as being alert to the "conflicting pressures clinicians" deal with, in an effort to provide the best possible care while at the same time dealing with resource limitations and respecting cultural norms.

In the face of challenges, Dr. Bezanson continues to offer guidance, develop actionable policy, collaborate, and teach through lectures, workshops, presentations, and publications.

People who have worked with Dr. Bezanson have been inspired by him and appreciate the grace, dedication, courage, warmth, and humility he brings to the field of palliative medicine.