For millennia, Indigenous people have lived on the land that has become Canada. They organized into their own nations and societies, and enjoyed excellent health. Following contact, they became known as the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The process of colonization has wreaked havoc on Indigenous people – at the societal and individual levels. As a consequence, they now face severe challenges because of deficits in many health determinants, coupled with sociopolitical structures that have eroded and compromised their historic self-governance. The First Nations people in Canada experience huge disparities in health vis-à-vis their non-Indigenous counterparts; HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C exemplify this. Indigenous people have also become increasingly over-represented in the criminal justice system (CJS), an environment known to put people at increased risk for STBBIs. Post-release from the CJS, various medical therapies need to be continued, or in some cases, initiated, including ART, HCV treatment and opioid substitution therapy, as well as management of various comorbidities. Furthermore, many First Nations, Inuit and Métis people want wholistic healing, be it continuing the spiritual healing begun in the CJS, or starting a community-based spiritual healing journey.

This presentation will explore the background and current context of each of these. British Columbia, Canada and Indigenous women, particularly First Nations women, will be particular foci.

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Alexandra is a member of the Nipissing First Nation (Ontario). Her ancestry includes Ojibwe, Mohawk, Algonquin, and mixed European. She specializes in Internal Medicine, with a practice that includes urban (Vancouver) and more remote (Williams Lake) communities. Throughout her medical training, she received numerous awards for her activism, including the Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Award, the President’s Award for the Outstanding Native Student of the Year and the Dr. John Big Canoe Memorial Scholarship. She is honoured to be the 2014-2015 James Kreppner Fellow at the Canadian HIV Trials Network while doing a PhD at Simon Fraser University. She is focusing on intervention research at the nexus of health determinants, mental health and addictions, blood-borne and sexually transmitted infections, and incarceration in Indigenous women in Canada. She serves on many local and national initiatives including CIHR HIV/AIDS Community-Based Research Steering Committee, Canadian National Aboriginal Working Group on HIV & AIDS, and Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver.