

Our Voices, Our Experiences: Innovation Through Inclusion in the Sciences

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Diversity drives innovation. This statement is central in the research enterprise, as well as in the private sector. Different perspectives, as defined by different experiences, different backgrounds, and different ways of thought, are valuable in creative solution-finding. “Diversity drives innovation” is the clarion call surrounding inclusion initiatives in science, technology, healthcare, engineering and mathematics.

For persons with disabilities in STEM and healthcare, this axiom is much more challenging. Different perspectives and different ways of thought are not often correlated with different abilities in the minds of educators, hiring managers and policy makers. Societal perception of ability has been a generational problem. While the history of STEM is replete with persons with disabilities, the proportion of persons with disabilities in STEM in the latter half of the 20th century is considerably lower.

Over the past decade, the successful engagement of persons with disabilities in STEM and healthcare has become a more significant and mainstream topic within the education and policy landscape. Research initiatives examining barriers to career participation in STEM and healthcare disciplines have been launched. Human rights cases have gone forward against a few universities for exclusionary practices in doctoral and professional programs. Today, careers in equity in STEM and healthcare are viable; we hope that in the near future, a career in accessibility in STEM and healthcare will be just as viable to trainees who are interested.

Being a scientist and researcher with a disability can be a very isolating, and very personal, journey. This presentation will focus on the history of disability in STEM, the stigma and barriers associated with that lived experience, and on a vision for inclusion in the STEM training and research environment.

Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai is Canada’s only congenitally blind biomedical research scientist. Dr. Sukhai is currently Head of Research and Chief Accessibility Officer of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Dr. Sukhai is an accomplished researcher and scientist, and the leader of national projects to understand the impact of vision loss on social determinants of health, as well as in the context of accessibility and inclusion in employment and education, with a particular focus on STEM.

Date: Tuesday, 3 March, 2020

Location: Lumbers 306

Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 noon or 2:00 – 4:00pm

If you have any questions, please contact Joanne Sequeira (adminres@yorku.ca)