Dr. Karen Hill:

My name is [speaking in Mohawk language] in my language which means “precious song.” My English name is Karen Hill and I'm a family doctor and I work here at Six Nations, which is my home community.

Why did you choose to become a Doctor?

First of all, there's no healthcare system in First Nations communities. There's no such thing. There's a lot of these little federal health centers that are just planted there, and you've got doctors that go in you know a day a week, or a day a month, but no doctors that were building relationships with the community, that we're hearing from the community, the culture and the language is what's going to help us through this myriad of chronic disease that we seem to be experiencing at higher rates than the Canadian population. So, I started seeing that and just realized that I met the criteria to go to medical school, and it was something that I'd wanted to do when I was much younger, and I just sort of reawakened that desire and I thought you know what now is the time for me to apply and go to medical school and actually do something to bring about a healthcare system for my community at least. And one that espouses that traditional knowledge that our people are asking for as part of their healing.

Dr. Cheryl Barnabe:

Karen went ahead and co-founded Judas Place, which is a place where patients from Six Nations can access both Western medicine as well as Traditional medicine in their most appropriate context for what they need at the time.

Dr. Karen Hill:

So what we do here at Judas Place, is we offer an environment where our people can come and be comfortable in who they are as indigenous people. They don't need to hide the fact that they're using traditional medicine or that they have beliefs about their health or their illness that are rooted in the culture. They're open to share that with me as a Western trained physician, and stand in who they are and not be afraid to just you know say “well you know I have a sore throat” and accept their pills, you know and do their blood work and move on... which is the Western Way because that's not really our way, our view of health and our view of illness is much more encompassing of who we are. That's why language and culture are important to our healing. It's not just about treating what's wrong, it's about supporting what is good and what is healthy, right? So that's what we offer here, and the opportunity for people to say “I want to see the traditional medicine practitioner.” Or people who only use traditional medicine and have for years and years, they have the opportunity to access help or support from a Western trained physician without fear, you know, of retribution, you know from me, because they've not seen a doctor in 30 or 40 years, right? I won't beat them up. [Chuckles]

Dr. Cheryl Barnabe:

Karin has always had the vision that providing health care for Indigenous patients should be more than just a system or a clinic where people go to treat their diseases.

What Does Winning this award mean to you?

Dr. Karen Hill:

I'm not an awards kind of person, you know? Or you know, working to get awards or anything like that.. but it's important to acknowledge the work, number one because we're bringing our own knowledge back into the center of healthcare. At one point in time before colonization traditional knowledge, traditional medicine practice was the only health care we had, right? It was Western knowledge, Western thought, Western practice was imposed upon us and really took the place of that traditional knowledge. It stole it away, didn't ask, just pushed it out, right?

So it's important that we acknowledge the work that indigenous physicians specifically are doing to help our people to bring that knowledge back to the center.