

Mapmaking

Niresha Velmurugiah, BMedSc

A night shift in the emergency department is a scrambled map of the city. Eagle Ridge and Boyle Street converge abruptly onto a canvas of scuffed linoleum floors and fluorescent lights. The coordinates switch with dizzying frequency, and the zones have no boundaries. The heat of the ambulance lights has evaporated the contour of the North Saskatchewan River until the suburbs jumble with the urban core.

Edmonton is strange in the way of most cities. The busker on the street corner is classically trained. The most popular restaurant in Chinatown has barely any Chinese clientele. The girls sporting feather headbands veer away from Aboriginal street people. At the transit centre, the city organizes. Indian families are heading to the Millwoods bus stop, and the university crowd is lining up for Whyte Avenue. Unknowable rules.

But tonight at the Royal Alex Hospital, the downtown Hope Mission is shoulder to shoulder with the

gated west end. From behind a wisp of curtain, the south side ravines listen to the stories from 118th Avenue. The uptown cul-de-sacs share a meal with central low-income housing. Norwood Seniors' Home drifts off to the unfamiliar conversations from the northeast Somali community.

This unruly atlas will scatter its contents back into the cold streets of Edmonton. With locked doors, crossed roads, and averted gazes, the city will regain its inscrutable order. Each night, behind the glowing red signs of the emergency department, a temporary rebellion stirs. Laid bare by shapeless gowns and exhaustion, people hear and see one another with new boldness and curiosity. Edmonton finally finds the rhythmic breath of community.

Competing interests: None declared.

Keywords: diversity, emergency department, inner city

From the Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Correspondence to: Niresha Velmurugiah, #506 10180 104 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5J 1A7; velmurug@ualberta.ca.

This article has been peer reviewed.

© Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians

CJEM 2015;17(1):99

DOI 10.2310/8000.2013.131379

DECKER



CJEM • *JCMU*

2015;17(1) 99