



Canada's family physicians

A world resource

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With increasing numbers of people from distant nations visiting or moving to Canada and more Canadians traveling to remote corners of the globe, the 4 principles of family medicine have acquired expanded meaning. Being a skilled clinician must now include knowledge of illnesses and disease patterns often not found in Canada; the patient-doctor relationship needs to incorporate an understanding of a range of cultures and the various ways of dealing with health and illness; the term *community-based* takes on a universal definition; and, as a resource to the population, Canada's family physicians need to provide evidence-based advice and care for those who consult them regarding medical concerns that arise locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

Culture challenge

In today's world, family doctors must pay attention to a multitude of factors affecting the health and well-being of the world's population, from environmental pollutants and climate change to the quality of our food and water. In their day-to-day encounters with patients, however, one of their most pressing challenges is trying to understand and respond to the needs of patients with various backgrounds—whether it be when caring for patients who have recently arrived in Canada or while providing medical services in other countries.

To address this reality and to try to support our members who are interested or involved in global health activities, the College has undertaken several initiatives:

- established an international and global family medicine committee to identify the priorities that require attention from our College and the university departments of family medicine,
- doubled our presence on the World Organization of Family Doctors' (WONCA) World Council with representatives from our Sections of Teachers and Researchers joining our 2 other College delegates,
- hosted a 6-nation symposium on the future of family practice,
- support efforts of academic departments of family medicine involved in helping establish our discipline in developing countries, and
- meet with delegations from various countries seeking advice about the development of family medicine teaching programs, clinical practice models, and organizations that represent the discipline of family medicine and its physicians in their health systems.

Increasing awareness

We have also tried to increase our awareness of and capacity to respond to populations in need—both close to home and far away. At Family Medicine Forum (FMF) 2007 in Winnipeg, Man, 2 keynote sessions focused on this objective.

Ms Gail Asper presented the annual Family Medicine Lectureship. After several years of proposals to governments, she and her family succeeded in their quest to establish The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which will open in Winnipeg in 2010. The museum will be dedicated to the stories of those who throughout history—and still today—have suffered abrogations and denials of their rights as human beings. It is important for everyone, including family physicians, to understand how this affects the health and survival of those who are or were neglected and those who love and care for them. The museum's founders have recognized the value of having our College and its family physicians help bring the vision of the museum to life by advocating for the rights of patients and populations, including the right to access quality care, regardless of geography, personal finances, race, culture, age, sex, sexual orientation, or physical and mental challenges. During this time of human resource shortages and financial constraints in our health care system, these issues have become more important than ever.

In another keynote address, 11-year-old Hannah Taylor recalled how at the age of 6 she turned her questions and concerns about street people into The Ladybug Foundation, which supports the homeless and hungry. Hannah, who has been recognized internationally for her outstanding efforts, invited all of us to join her in helping those who have found themselves desperately in need of the basics in life, including food and shelter.

Following these presentations, the National College and our Manitoba Chapter were joined by Scotiabank and guest entertainer Chantal Kreviazuk in providing our 2007 FMF donation to support the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and The Ladybug Foundation. These contributions add to the efforts of the College and its members over the past few years to support The Stephen Lewis Foundation for HIV and AIDS in Africa, the victims of the Indonesian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and the CARE Canada project for HIV and AIDS patients in Haiti.

Through their practices and our College initiatives, Canadian family physicians are committed to being a resource to populations in need, wherever they might be in our global community. 