



# Research in family medicine

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At the heart of research is the quest for new knowledge. Research in family medicine provides an important contribution to our discipline. Although typically it has not been seen as a "big draw" for those interested in family medicine, it is a vital component of what we do to care for our patients.

Results of research help us know how best to treat our patients. Research informs the process of education for both family doctors and their patients. It teaches us new ways of doing things, and it leads us to a broader understanding and clearer vision of what we do.

Research should not be viewed simply as a branch of our discipline. In many ways, research is the root of family medicine. While research often takes place behind the scenes, without it our discipline might not exist.

## Section of Researchers

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) has had a Section of Researchers for 12 years. Its goals are to identify, prioritize, and promote family medicine research topics; expand the capacity for family medicine research; identify and build resources for family medicine research; increase collaboration and communication among researchers; change attitudes toward family medicine research; and facilitate dissemination of family medicine research findings to physicians in practice. The Section supports a growing community of primary care researchers from across the country and helps to connect them with other researchers around the world.

The Section of Researchers has continued to grow since its inception. It has links to family medicine research activities in all medical schools across Canada. Research is becoming more visible in most of our schools, and residents are involved in research projects and research days. The quality of these activities continues to increase, and the Section has helped to identify and recognize an increasing number of successful researchers in both academic and practice communities.

This increase has happened with relatively little support from outside family medicine. Health care research funding has tended to focus on hospital-based, highly technical services. While the activities that are supported are important, we family doctors are particularly aware that most health care happens outside institutions. Indeed, one marker of successful health care could be the rate at which patients are kept out of institutions!

There are signs that this research focus is beginning to shift, albeit slowly. The Canadian Institute for Health Information provides essential data as well as analysis

of Canada's health care system. In recent years, they have begun to recognize the importance of primary care and to support an increasing number of projects. They have funded CFPC's research in several important areas, including looking at increasing supports for primary care, studying the role of family medicine in the undergraduate curriculum, clarifying the relationship between family doctors and other specialists, and describing the development of family medicine interest groups.

The push for more and better data drives research. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the main funding source for health research in Canada, have focused primarily on highly specialized areas of the health care system. Although the CIHR have been late in recognizing the importance of primary care research, they have now done so. Recently, some funding has flowed from the CIHR to primary care researchers.

While it is critical that there be more public funding of family medicine research and the primary health care system, as family doctors, we must take some responsibility for creating and supporting this focus.

## Research and Education Foundation

The CFPC's Research and Education Foundation (REF) was established in 1995. Its mission is to provide funding to support teachers, researchers, and practitioners of family medicine in development and dissemination of new knowledge and skills in order to improve the quality of comprehensive, patient-centred, community-based health care for all Canadians.

Since its inception, the REF has raised more than \$6 million. Of this, about 20% has come from individual donors from across the country, mostly family doctors themselves. The remainder has come from corporations and foundations that have observed that the endeavour is strongly supported by individual College members. Nearly 2200 individual and other donors have contributed.

Supporting the REF supports the future of family medicine. The more support it receives from individual family doctors, the more support research in family medicine can expect to receive from others.

One tangible way you can support the REF is through the annual Walk for the Docs of Tomorrow. This year the walk is on Saturday morning, October 13, in Winnipeg, Man, as part of Family Medicine Forum 2007. Even if you cannot walk yourself, you can sponsor a colleague.

Family medicine research, the CFPC's Section of Researchers, and the REF are all important parts of the community of family medicine in Canada. 