

Saying goodbye

Mourning one of the pioneers of family medicine in Canada

Terry-Nan Tannenbaum MD MPH MMgmt David Tannenbaum MD

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Isaac Tannenbaum, MD, CCFP, FCFP, who passed away on April 30, 2008, at the age of 87. Dr Tannenbaum was one of the leaders in developing the specialty of family medicine in Montreal, Que, and across Canada. He was considered a model physician by the many students, residents, and colleagues who had the privilege to work with him during his 48 years as a practising family physician, teacher, and Chief of the Herzl Family Practice Centre at the Jewish General Hospital (JGH) in Montreal.

Isaac (Issie) Tannenbaum was born in Lvov, Poland, but grew up in Montreal, where he attended McGill University. He received his medical degree in 1944 and, after completing a year of residency in New Jersey, worked for a short time as a general practitioner in rural Saskatchewan.

Upon returning to Montreal, Dr Tannenbaum opened an office and practised from 1947 until his retirement in 1995. He was a devoted and skilled family physician: he practised a full scope of comprehensive care, including obstetrics and in-hospital care, and did daily housecalls, on which he routinely took his children. He was tenacious, forward thinking, and deeply committed to best practices. He won great admiration and respect from his peers when he developed a 2-year residency program in family medicine at the JGH, designed according to the standards of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, which accepted its first residents in 1969. When McGill University established a Department of Family Medicine within its Faculty of Medicine, the JGH Family Practice Centre became one of its important teaching units and Dr Tannenbaum was appointed an Associate Professor—the first family doctor to hold an academic position at McGill.

When he became Chief of the new Herzl Family Practice Centre, he wrote the following in the 1974 departmental report: “In all modesty I can state that the new Herzl Family Practice Centre will be foremost among community health centres in this province in providing primary, comprehensive and continuing care on a preventative and therapeutic basis. Our work is not confined to the hospital. Through various community projects, we are extending our scope into the community at various levels.”¹


Dr Tannenbaum’s vision for family medicine was passed down to the many residents with whom he worked during his tenure as Chief. When he returned to full-time community practice, Dr Tannenbaum continued to teach part-time and often provided community practice opportunities for residents in the JGH program. In recognition of his contributions, in 1981 the McGill



Department of Family Medicine created the annual Isaac Tannenbaum Research Day in his honour.

Throughout his career, Dr Tannenbaum was an active member of several professional associations, working tirelessly to promote and establish an active and respected family medicine presence within the medical community. Although a strong personality, he was able to make his point without alienating others.

Dr Tannenbaum was universally admired and respected for the care and dedication he gave to his patients and for his commitment to excellence in the delivery of primary care. He was admired and loved by friends, colleagues, and patients and cherished by his family. He is survived by Ada, his wife of 60 years, and his children, Terry-Nan and Andre (Dascal) of Montreal, David and Mayta of Toronto, Ont, and Lynn and George (Collin) of Calgary, Alta, as well as 6 grandchildren and extended family members.

Isaac Tannenbaum left his mark as a husband, father, grandfather, and physician. One of his students and colleagues said, “There were many who taught me medicine ... but [Issie] taught me how to be a doctor.” Family medicine was fortunate to have Dr Tannenbaum as one of its champions—his legacy lives on. 

Dr Terry-Nan Tannenbaum is Chief of Health Protection in the Department of Public Health at the Montreal Health and Social Services Agency in Quebec and an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University in Montreal. **Dr David Tannenbaum** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto in Ontario and the Family Physician-in-Chief at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

Acknowledgment

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Reference

1. Regenstein M. *Our history of family practice*. Montreal, QC: Herzl Family Practice Centre, Department of Family Medicine, Sir Mortimer B. Davis Jewish General Hospital; 1994.