



## The teaching issue

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*I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.*

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

My first real exposure to family medicine came during a third-year elective with Dr Maurice Smith, the father of a friend, who had a busy practice in the east end of Toronto, Ont. Dr Smith, who had trained in Scotland, usually began his day with either a home visit to an elderly patient or a trip to the then Riverdale Hospital to look after one of his more sick patients undergoing treatment. After that he returned to his simple unpretentious upstairs office at the corner of Danforth Avenue and Main Street, where he would see patients every 10 or 15 minutes until late in the day. Most of his patients were older and many had emigrated from the British Isles, much like my own parents. Over the course of a month I saw dozens of people with common problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, and the like. Much of the teaching that Dr Smith provided was “bite-sized” and it always linked to a patient we saw together. Compared with my experiences on the wards of teaching hospitals in specialties like internal medicine and surgery, Dr Smith’s instruction seemed a sparse and somehow lesser educational experience. How wrong I was. It was only when I became a family physician and teacher myself that I realized that by allowing me to join in his life as a family doctor he was providing me with ideal conditions in which I might learn his craft.

Although many family physicians in Canada are involved in teaching, there is a need for greater involvement if we are to successfully recruit medical students to rewarding careers in family medicine. In a commentary in this month’s journal (page 862), Drs Diane Clavet and Allyn Walsh of the Section of Teachers of Family Medicine make the case and also highlight the many ways that family physicians are and can be involved in teaching and influencing medical students and family medicine residents.<sup>1</sup>


This month’s issue of *Canadian Family Physician* also features the relaunch of the Section of Teachers of Family Medicine page, under the section title “Teaching Moment” (page 948).<sup>2</sup> The title reflects the fact that

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 861.

in the busy family medicine setting both teaching and learning take place in “bite-sized” bits. Under the editorship of Drs Clavet and Walsh, we hope that teachers of family medicine across the country will find “Teaching Moment” a useful aid as they continue to provide the conditions in which future family physicians can learn.

September is back-to-school month for students of all ages across Canada, and it is fitting that in addition to the new teacher’s page this issue also features several research articles that focus on teaching and education—the influence of third-year family medicine training on practice patterns after graduation (page 906), resident and program director perspectives on third-year training programs (page 904),<sup>3,4</sup> and a review of teaching-skills training programs (page 902)<sup>5</sup>—as well as a program description of interprofessional education in a family health team (page 901).<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, I would like to highlight that the organization Canadian Doctors for Medicare has launched a peer-reviewed essay competition for Canadian medical students and residents in partnership with the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* and *Canadian Family Physician*. Medical students and residents are invited to submit a 1500-word article on their vision for a better Medicare. Successful submissions will be published in these journals and an overall winner for the competition will be honoured. Details for the article requirements and the submission and selection process can be found on the website [www.mybettermedicare.ca](http://www.mybettermedicare.ca).

I hope that the many dedicated teachers of family medicine across the country will find something of interest and value in this month’s journal. 

### Competing interests

Dr Pimlott is a member of Canadian Doctors for Medicare.

### References

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3. Green M, Birtwhistle R, MacDonald K, Kane J, Schmelzle J. Practice patterns of graduates of 2- and 3-year family medicine programs. *Can Fam Physician* 2009;55:906-7.e1-19.
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5. Lacasse M, Ratnapalan S. Teaching-skills training programs for family medicine residents. Systematic review of formats, content, and effects of existing programs. *Can Fam Physician* 2009;55:902-3.e1-5.
6. Price D, Howard M, Hiltz L, Dolovich L, McCarthy L, Walsh AE, et al. Interprofessional education in academic family medicine teaching units. A functional program and culture. *Can Fam Physician* 2009;55:901.e1-5.

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