



Carrying the torch

Cal Gutkin MD CCFP(EM) FCFP, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Late one afternoon this past summer, we received a call from a representative of the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee, inviting the College to name 20 family physician members to take part in the 2010 Olympic torch relay. We were humbled to be invited and to be told that this invitation was recognizing the important role played by Canada's family doctors and the synchrony that exists between the life work of family physicians and the Olympic ideal.


On December 21, 2009, in Welland, Ont, 20 College members stood proudly on stage for the special ceremony in which our torch was lit from the cauldron that begins each leg of the relay. Following the kind words from the master of ceremonies about the contributions made by family doctors and our College to Canadians,

To carry a torch is to have an ongoing passion for or belief in something or someone. The words have been used to describe the fire that burns in the soul of one in love, the mantle of responsibility passed on from a departing leader to her successor, or the badge of honour that a weary warrior entrusts to the soldier sent to replace him in the field of battle.

So too, the words have established themselves in the history of the Olympic Games. Commemorating the theft of fire from the Greek god Zeus by Prometheus, the origins of the Olympic torch lie in ancient Greece, where a flame was kept burning throughout the original Olympic Games. The torch relay is a modern tradition that began at the 1936 Berlin Summer Games (interestingly, commissioned by Adolph Hitler to create a symbolic link between the supposedly superior ancient Greek society and the German Reich). The relay traverses the streets of the host nation, with selected runners each carrying a torch bearing the flame ignited at the site of the ancient Games in Olympia. Despite frequent demonstrations and confrontations with protesters along its routes related to many global or local concerns, the torch relay has remained a vital symbol of the Games, promoting peace and good sportsmanship among continents and peoples, and reminding all of the importance of physical activity to health and well-being.



Olympic torchbearers (left to right): *Back row*—Drs Bernard Marlow, Jonathan Kerr, Ian Casson, Nick Pimlott, Sandy Buchman, Frank Martino, Val Rachlis, Rob Boulay. *Centre row*—Drs Risa Bordman, Ruth Wilson, Ieva Neimanis, Cathy MacLean, Francine Lemire, Cal Gutkin, Sarah Kredentser. *Front row*—Dr Kendall Noel, baby Olivier Noel, Dr Harold Dion, torch relay organizer Nadine, Drs Clarissa Holding, Allyn Walsh, Michael Lee-Poy.

we began our 1-km run through the city, cheered on by supportive onlookers. The torch bearing the fire from Olympia—which had already made its way from Victoria, BC, across Canada's north to Atlantic Canada, and which was now headed west to its dramatic final moment when it would enter GM Place in Vancouver, BC, to light the flame that would burn throughout the 2010 Games—was now in our hands. As our National President, Dr Cathy MacLean, who had just 2 weeks earlier assumed the torch of College leadership from her predecessor, Dr Sarah Kredentser, said, "The College was invited to carry the Olympic torch to deliver the message that Canada's family doctors promote active healthy living with their patients and students every day. We were honoured and excited to be part of this event and hope that our involvement helps inspire Canadians to pursue a healthy lifestyle and physical activity as part of their daily lives." 

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