

# Rebuttal: Should older family physicians retire?

Gordon L. Dickie MBChB FCFP

## NO

**D**r Racine discusses the pleasures of retirement and the inevitable decline and decay of the aged physician.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, counterarguments can prevail.

**Because we are not going to live forever.** Dr Racine seems to be saying that family physicians should retire because life is short. Am I to infer that I must retire and like it even if I am willing and able to continue working?

**Because as we age, we inevitably lose some of our vitality.** The references that Dr Racine cites do not demonstrate cause and effect. People might become decrepit and clearly unfit for practice. If this occurred at a specific age, it would be easy to define an age at which physicians should quit. As it is, we are fortunate to have an organization, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, that endorses creditable continuing medical education programs, as well as licensing authorities that require certain standards for continuing practice. These are not age dependent. Physicians are required to notify these authorities if they have conditions that might compromise their ability to practise, and, indeed, colleagues are required to inform the same authorities if they suspect such deficiencies in others. It is our privilege to be a self-governing profession, and we have a duty to ensure the competency of colleagues of all ages.

**Making room for younger physicians.** In my experience there are fewer and fewer physicians who “won’t” retire where younger physicians wish to replace them. There was a time when it was hard to get hospital privileges in smaller towns because it would “dilute the patient pool.” This is hardly the case today. Dr Racine cites a reference from Texas in 1991.<sup>2</sup> Are conditions in modern-day Canada the same?

As Dr Racine relinquishes his medical activities, it is clear he has much to look forward to. I wish him well in his retirement. I hope he will also appreciate the continuing satisfaction of those of his cohorts who continue to hew wood and draw water on the lower slopes of Parnassus. 🍁

**Dr Dickie** is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Family Medicine at the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Western Ontario in London.

**Competing interests**  
None declared

### Correspondence

**Dr Gordon Dickie**, Parkwood Hospital, 801 Commissioners Rd E, London, ON N6C 5J1; telephone 519 685-4810; fax 519 685-4811; e-mail [gldickie@uwo.ca](mailto:gldickie@uwo.ca)

### References

1. Racine M. Should older family physicians retire? Yes [Debate]. *Can Fam Physician* 2012;58:22,24 (Eng), 26,28 (Fr).
2. Martin D. Is there life after medicine? Texas physicians talk about retirement. *Tex Med* 1991;87(7):36-45.

These rebuttals are responses from the authors of the debates in the January issue (*Can Fam Physician* 2012;58:22-4 [Eng], 26-9 [Fr]).

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