



Inspirations

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

I am a part of all that I have met.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

On November 1, 1995, I assumed the role of Associate Executive Director of the College, beginning my journey toward becoming the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on March 1, 1996. It seems like just yesterday that I was preparing the first of my Vital Signs articles for *Canadian Family Physician*. This will be my 202nd and final piece. The feedback you provided and the suggestions you made for topics were amazing and inspired me to keep going. Thank you for bearing with me—you are a part of all that I have written!

Sharing a vision

The opportunity to serve as the CFPC's Executive Director interested me because of all that I had learned about the College through my years on the Executive Committee of the Ontario Chapter and the National Board, combined with what I had come to appreciate as a practising and teaching family physician about the vital role played by family doctors in caring for the people of Canada and in training our future physicians. I understood that it was the formation of our College in 1954 that saved general and family practice at a time when almost all new graduates were choosing to enter the growing universe of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) specialties. By 1996, thanks to outstanding leadership provided by the College and our academic leaders across Canada, family medicine had developed and matured as a credible discipline and was playing a vital role in the care of Canadians. Since then, the world—including Canada—has had the opportunity to learn from the research of Starfield and others that it is access to family physicians providing comprehensive continuing care that is the single most powerful predictor of better population health outcomes. But family practice could not have proven its value and would not have been around to make this critical contribution if it had not been saved from potential obscurity through the efforts of those who founded and built our College. They recognized how crucial it was for family medicine to plant its roots within academic medicine as a credible discipline—as a specialty equal to all others. It was they who understood that to thrive as valued health care professionals in communities large and small across this nation, family physicians had to have a respected place within the world of academic medicine. Despite the incredible work

done between 1954 and 1996—beginning with a commitment to establishing standards and requirements for continuing medical education and then extending this into postgraduate training, research, and undergraduate education—many challenges still remained related to the sustainability and growth of family medicine as a discipline. Inspired by the historical accomplishments of the College and its leaders (Victor Johnston, Donald Rice, and Reg Perkin) and the discipline (led by people like Ian McWhinney), I decided to move my career from the front lines of practice and teaching that I so thoroughly enjoyed to taking on the exciting challenges of the work that still needed to be done by the CFPC.

Unfortunately, some family doctors view the past and current CFPC commitments to academic family medicine—and see being part of the College—as peripheral to what they do in their day-to-day practices. This perception could not be more wrong. For it is by having established and continuing to grow its place in the medical school and academic medicine world that family medicine has become and will continue to be recognized by students, peers in medicine, and the population at large as the credible and vital discipline and specialty that it is. It is because it is part of the academic medical universe that family medicine in Canada uprooted itself from near extinction to become, as it is today, the most popular first choice of Canadian medical school graduates for their residency training and career paths (35% selected family medicine as their first choice in 2012, and 40% of all first-year postgraduate training posts in Canada are currently in family medicine).¹ It is why family physicians represent slightly more than 50% of all physicians practising in Canada today. It is because of the important role the CFPC plays in setting standards and accrediting programs for formative education and lifelong learning that it is seen by governments, other stakeholders, and the public as a credible and trusted advocacy group—a voice—for family doctors and their patients. And it is because family doctors are viewed by Canadians as well trained and committed to a discipline that espouses lifelong learning and a patient-centred philosophy of care that every public poll consistently tells us how highly the people of Canada value having personal family physicians, with the main concern being that about 12% of the population is still without family doctors.

Better together

The CFPC did not and cannot achieve what it does alone. Many sister organizations working together with the CFPC are responsible for saving and strengthening family

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medicine in Canada. In 1954 the CFPC was created by a resolution of the Canadian Medical Association (similar to its motion approving the RCPSC 25 years earlier), and there is a strong and important commitment to family practice and collaboration with the CFPC on the part of the Canadian Medical Association and its provincial and territorial associations. The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada and Canada's 17 medical schools have welcomed family medicine leaders into vital leadership positions in academic medicine, including numerous family physicians who have now served as Dean of Medicine and as Postgraduate and Undergraduate Associate Dean, reinforcing the message that family medicine is a respected and credible discipline and a specialty equal to all others. The leadership of the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada in its Future of Medical Education in Canada project and its support for the CFPC's new Triple C Competency-based Curriculum (focused on *comprehensiveness* and *continuity*, and *centred* in family medicine) are part of a critical ongoing partnership. This past year, the RCPSC council unanimously endorsed our College's Patient's Medical Home vision for the future of family practice in Canada—a concept that envisions family physicians, other medical specialists, nurses, and other health professionals training and practising collaboratively to provide the best possible access to care for every person in Canada. The support received from the Canadian Family Practice Nurses Association was and will also continue to be essential to achieving this Patient's Medical Home vision. The CFPC's relationships with the Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada and the Medical Council of Canada have been outstanding, as we move to more clearly defining and harmonizing the requirements—and the examinations—for physicians to gain and maintain both an unrestricted licence to practise and their Certification in family medicine. The bonds we have established and the regular exchanges we are part of with our world partners in family medicine, through WONCA and with the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Board of Family Medicine, have been invaluable. The leaders of these and other sister organizations who respect family medicine and who walk the talk of aspiring to the best possible health outcomes achieved through progressive and truly collaborative models of training and practice have been inspirations for me throughout my years with our College. The teams I have been part of both within the CFPC and with many external partners and stakeholders have provided me with inestimable opportunity for professional and personal growth—and also resulted in friendships and bonds that I hope will remain forever.

Despite all of this, however, it is family doctors themselves—in their roles as front-line physicians providing high-quality care for their patients; as teachers, researchers,

and contributors to the health care system; and as professionals dedicated to meeting the lifelong learning standards of our College—who have been the key to strengthening family medicine in Canada. For the College, the reward has been a doubling of membership over the past decade to more than 28300 current members. The commitment of the CFPC's members to the goals and principles of our College and their efforts to help us continuously improve what we do ensures an ongoing vital role for family medicine in Canada for many years to come.

While it is not expected that everyone will understand how much work is being done behind the scenes, it should be known by all that there are very dedicated and skilled staff in the National College head office and in each of our 10 Chapters. These people share the principles and values that define our College and work tirelessly to support family doctors and everything the College is doing on behalf of its members. Led by a team of senior directors from the National College and executive directors and administrators from the Chapters, this is a very special group without whom I could never have done my job. Of particular importance to me are those in the CFPC's Executive Department, with whom I have worked most closely each and every day. For almost the entire time I have held this position, my Executive Assistant was Judy McCracken and the Administrative Assistant, now CFPC Meetings Manager, was Joanne Langevin—each of whom supported me brilliantly through the many different responsibilities they assumed from day 1 through day 6146. More recently Randi Holden-Stanley and Lynda Wilson have taken on these key roles and have done a superb job. Sarah Scott, who for the past several years has generated much of the background material and thought that drives our Executive team and Board, has been an indispensable resource and ally for me. Our Family Medicine Forum (FMF) Manager, Cheryl Selig, and FMF Business Manager, Naomi Wagschal, have been indefatigable over the years, leading an FMF team that has seen our Annual Scientific Assembly grow from 500 attendees in 1999 to 5000 in 2012!

Hundreds of members dedicate their time to chair or be part of our National Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, and our dozens of committees and task forces—a volunteer commitment essential to the College being a relevant and effective organization. The CFPC's voice is the voice of its members, led by those who contribute to committees and participate in the activities of the National College and its provincial Chapters. One of the great joys for me has been the opportunity to attend the provincial Chapters' annual meetings as often as I could. Because of this I learned about this great country and the incredible people who inhabit it—especially the hundreds of unforgettable family physician members and their families who welcomed me into their midst. What I learned from these experiences enriched my life beyond measure.

Gifts of inspiration

To say that the CFPC presidents I have had the privilege of serving with have been inspirations for me understates the reality. Each, in his or her own way, brought skill, wisdom, elegance, humour, understanding, compassion, and the invaluable perspective of an experienced and knowledgeable family doctor to the leadership portfolio. Each spent 120 or more days during his or her year as President totally committed to the CFPC (on top of 5 years on the Executive Committee). One of the greatest rewards of my life has been the opportunity to work with these individuals, and for me, my wife, and my family to get to know their life partners and families personally. Thank you Jean-Pierre Despins, Cheri Bethune, Nick Busing, Francine Lemire, Peter Newbery, Don Gelhorn, Dominique Tessier, Peter MacKean, Rob Wedel, Alain Pavilanis, Louise Nasmith, Tom Bailey, Ruth Wilson, Sarah Kredentser, Cathy MacLean, Rob Boulay, Sandy Buchman, and Marie-Dominique Beaulieu—true inspirations and lifelong friends!

When I assumed the role of Executive Director and CEO, I had the opportunity to work for a few months with my predecessor, Reg Perkin. I thought then—and still do—that I could never fill Reg's shoes. His contributions to the CFPC and to family medicine during his tenure in this office (1985 to 1996) were immense. Reg and those who preceded him as our College's executive directors—Donald I. Rice (1965 to 1985) and Victor Johnston (1954 to 1965)—shall always remain inspirations for me, for it was these men who established this office and who built and strengthened the foundation of the College we have today. I am proud to have had the chance to follow in their footsteps.

As of January 1, 2013, the responsibilities of the CFPC's Executive Director and CEO office will be carried forward by another outstanding individual, Dr Francine Lemire. Francine was National College President from 1998 to 1999 and has served as Associate Executive Director for the past decade. She is an incredible individual who, as a young woman, underwent an above-knee amputation. How she faces challenges and overcomes adversity is illustrated by her having gone on to win gold and bronze medals for Canada in cross-country skiing at the 1988 Winter Paralympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria. Francine is a dedicated, wise, caring, very knowledgeable, and experienced family physician and family medicine leader. She is definitely one of my inspirations, and I am proud to be passing the Executive Director and CEO torch to her.

My greatest life inspirations, which carried on throughout my time with the College, have come from my personal friends and my family. My parents, Dorothy and Danny Gutkin, instilled in me the values I hold dearest—honesty, trust, respect for all others, caring for community and those less fortunate, hard work balanced with fun, a sense of humour, love of family and friends, and taking pride in all you do. They were constant supporters of the College, read every issue of our journal, supported the

College's Research and Education Foundation, and were always interested in the initiatives the College was undertaking. They passed away in 2005, within a week of each other. I miss them every day, but they stay with me and their influence remains within the College through all I do.

My sister, Cheryl, and her husband, Earl Barish, who live in Winnipeg, Man, carried on the family history of caring and support for me, my family, and the CFPC. They always asked and wanted to learn about each of our College's initiatives, and they promoted the values of the CFPC and family medicine among their friends as if they themselves were members. They have been important contributors to our foundation, have been regular readers of *Canadian Family Physician*, and have traveled to join us for every FMF during my time as Executive Director and CEO, no matter where in Canada it has been held. They made sure that, no matter where I was, I knew I was not alone.

When I began this position, my 3 daughters, Leah, Maia, and Michelle, were 10, 13, and 17 years old. They were children of the College who have now matured into wonderful young women with their own lives. Throughout the years—and to this day—they have been an important part of many Gutkin family-hosted CFPC executive and staff dinners, joined the College for many other special events, and volunteered and later worked for the College. They came to know many of our presidents and College staff and their families as if they were part of our own. In the past 10 years, Michelle's husband, Cory, and their daughter—our precious granddaughter, Maddie—have joined the rest of the Gutkins as part of the CFPC family.

Most important, my wife, Mary, has stood beside me as a leader in her own right in the College throughout these 17 years. She was the mainstay at home when the kids were younger and still needed her in that capacity, enabling me to focus as needed on the obligations, including considerable travel, that came with this position. She has supported everything I have done in this role—which often demanded time away from her and home—physically, intellectually, and emotionally. She was with me at hundreds of College events and never turned away from the chance to host our members or staff at our home. Mary is loved not just by me but also by everyone in the College who has had the privilege of getting to know her and share the many special times with both of us.

The opportunity to serve as Executive Director and CEO of this College has been an incredible privilege. The members, staff, and peers in sister organizations have taught me values and left me with memories I will cherish forever. I now better understand the rewards that Tennyson's Ulysses spoke of that come to one who is able to incorporate into his being the best parts of those he has met along the way during life's journey. I thank you for sharing those parts of yourselves with me—and for being my inspiration. 

Reference

1. CaRMS. *R-1 match reports*, 2012. Ottawa, ON: CaRMS; 2012.