



The CFPC's Research and Education Foundation

Giving back to family medicine

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Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege.

John D. Rockefeller


There are few among us who do not recognize the privilege we enjoy in having been given the opportunity to attend medical school, receive postgraduate training, and practise family medicine in Canada. All of us have worked very hard—and still do—to become the physicians we want to be. We also recognize that we did not get to where we are by ourselves: there were individuals or organizations that helped us on our journey and supported our efforts to achieve our dreams, from our parents and families to our spouses and partners to institutions and agencies.

One such agency is the Research and Education Foundation (REF) of the CFPC. Established in 1995, the REF is the only charitable organization in Canada dedicated solely to supporting the research and education initiatives carried out by family doctors on behalf of their patients. By providing funds to support family physician practitioners, teachers, and researchers to learn and disseminate new knowledge and skills, the REF has carried out its mission to improve the quality of comprehensive, patient-centred, community-based health care for all Canadians.¹ Through the generous support of its donors, the REF has been able to fund a number of research grants, scholarships, and awards that have had substantial effects on patient care in communities across Canada.

One such scholarship is the Janus Continuing Professional Development Scholarship. Dr Frances Alborg, a family doctor in Woodstock, NB, who works in a rural emergency department, was one of the recipients of this scholarship in 2009. Dr Alborg completed the Emergency Department Echo (EDE) course. With computed tomography available only on an "on call" basis and no ultrasound at all after regular office hours or on weekends, the EDE technique allowed Dr Alborg to more confidently identify those patients who required emergent intervention and those for whom intervention could be deferred. Not long after the EDE course was offered, the REF was informed of a success story in an early pickup of a leaking abdominal aortic aneurysm. This is an excellent example of REF dollars at work.

In 2009, Dr Marg Woods from Thunder Bay, Ont, received a Women's Health Scholarship to study addiction medicine in women. She reported that this award enabled her to improve her skill set in assessing and managing addiction; as a family physician for a northern First Nations community, she was now able to take on the management of many pregnant women with opioid addiction. She also began to serve as a resource to her colleagues and community partners in providing educational events and establishing collaborative partnerships. The REF made this training possible for Dr Woods, and this additional training has had a positive effect on the health of her patients.

I too was a beneficiary a number of years ago when I received the C. Robert Kemp Palliative Care Scholarship under the auspices of the REF. Working in a comprehensive family practice in Mississauga, Ont, I had begun to see more patients with HIV or AIDS, which of course in the early years was a terminal diagnosis. I believed I needed to upgrade my skills in palliative and end-of-life care, and the Kemp award allowed me to work and study with other family doctors who were already well versed in this field. I was able to assume more palliative care patients and to establish much-needed services in my local hospital. I will be forever indebted.

These are but 3 examples of the many hundreds of awards that the REF has offered to support family doctors in delivering high-quality health care to Canadians. The REF is successful because it is so capably led by the former CFPC President Dr Jamie Boyd, governed by a conscientious Board of Directors, and administered by a dedicated staff. The educational and social impact of the REF is one of the CFPC's best-kept secrets. But it shouldn't be. Its work is one of the finest examples of how the CFPC is carrying out its social responsibility in meeting the health care needs of Canadians through the education and support of family doctors. If you believe in supporting this mandate, and if you also believe that you were helped during your career as a family doctor, consider the opportunity to give back to family medicine through the REF. Experience the privilege. 

Reference

1. College of Family Physicians of Canada [website]. *Research and Education Foundation*. Mississauga, ON: College of Family Physicians of Canada; 2012. Available from: www.cfpc.ca/REF/. Accessed 2012 May 31.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 806.