

CFPC welcomes its 2016-2017 President, Dr David White



Dr David White of Toronto, Ont, was installed as the 63rd President of the College of Family Physicians of Canada on November 11, 2016, during the annual Family Medicine Forum in Vancouver, BC. He obtained his Certification in Family Medicine in 1977, achieved his Certificate of Special Competence in Emergency Medicine in 1983,

and became a Fellow of the College in 1995.

Growing up in Toronto, Dr White did not always plan on becoming a physician. He credits his career choice to the profound influences of his mother, a psychiatrist, and his father, a United Church minister. He attended medical school at the University of Toronto (U of T) in the early 1970s, and his exposure to the newly formed Department of Family and Community Medicine cemented his choice to pursue this fascinating specialty.

After residency, Dr White practised in Sioux Lookout, Ont, for 2 years, covering everything from anesthesia to emergency care to obstetrics. Returning to Toronto in 1980, he joined the Family Medicine Teaching Unit at Toronto Western Hospital, moved to Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto in 1986, and served as Chief of Family and Community Medicine at North York General Hospital (NYGH) in Ontario for 11 years between 1999 and 2012. Dr White was instrumental in helping to create the North York Family Health Team, where he practises comprehensive care.

Dr White began his lifelong dedication to teaching and education as a demonstrator with U of T's Sioux Lookout Program. He served as Director of Undergraduate Education with the Department of Family and Community Medicine (1985-1995) and Director of Electives with the Faculty of Medicine (1987-1997). In 2014, Dr White became Deputy Chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine, and in December 2016 he will complete his appointment as Interim Chair.

Family medicine research is another area in which Dr White has made enormous contributions. When he joined NYGH it had robust training programs but no research program; a year later he helped found the North Toronto Research Network, the first primary care

practice-based research network at U of T and one of the first in Canada. Dr White also helped establish the Gordon F. Cheesbrough Research Chair in Family and Community Medicine at NYGH in 2010, a bold idea for a community hospital.

A particularly dark time in Canadian medicine shone a bright light on Dr White's innate leadership abilities: The 2003 SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) crisis in Toronto was initially perceived as a hospital-based infection, leading to inadequate support for front-line family physicians. With his colleagues, Dr White lobbied for recognition of family physicians' role and for measures to mitigate their risk. He represented family physicians on the Ontario SARS Scientific Advisory Committee, and after the crisis he continued working to ensure that primary care providers are directly included in health care emergency planning.

Dr White has a long history of involvement with the CFPC. He was a member of the Committee on Examinations in Emergency Medicine (1984-1986) and participated in task forces on undergraduate education (1987-1995) and evaluation of family medicine residents (2000-2003). Dr White joined the Board of Directors in 2013, became Honorary Secretary-Treasurer in 2014, and President-Elect in 2015.

On the challenges of his term as CFPC President, Dr White says that while the importance of family medicine is well established, cash-strapped governments can be reluctant to invest in enhancing primary care. But he sees this as an opportunity and looks to the courage of the College's early champions for inspiration.

"The founding motto of the College is 'Strength in study'; it's really quite significant because there's obviously the literature that you read, but there's also studying your patients and your practice and your community," Dr White says. "It covers everything we're about: commitment to patients, commitment to continuing education, and the commitment to research and understanding our discipline. I love it. So when you talk about strengths, we have that foundation to build on."

Dr White is married to Dr June Carroll, a family physician and a leading researcher in primary care genomic medicine. They have 3 children. A passionate musician, Dr White is a guitarist in a rock band that plays weekly. In his early career, he spent 2 years working as an emergency physician part-time while pursuing music full-time, but ultimately decided medicine was the more promising profession.

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