



## Researching for answers

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Family doctors are generally inquisitive. We have a natural tendency to ask why and to wonder how we can make things better for our patients and for the health care system. It is that willingness to continue to learn and to improve lives that makes us excellent practitioners and researchers.

The CFPC's Section of Researchers (SOR)<sup>1</sup> brings together 3513 family physicians and non-family physician associate members to improve the health of Canadians through research and quality improvement.

Research has always been an important part of my career, and I have been a member of the SOR for many years. I began my research journey as an undergraduate student in a basic science laboratory doing nematode genetics and continued as a medical student and resident, doing field research in global health in the early years of the HIV epidemic in Papua New Guinea and Uganda. Those experiences were the start of my life-long passion for applied research and, in particular, for research that has an impact on care in the community.

My research now focuses on the role of primary care in Ontario's health care system and in Indigenous health.<sup>2,3</sup> I am proud to be identified as a family medicine researcher and I am continuing my involvement throughout my year as CFPC President.

As family physicians we always run into questions for which we do not have answers. Research helps answer these questions and needs to be done by researchers who understand family medicine. One important reason for this is *spectrum of disease bias*. If the only doctors who are taking part in research are other specialists, they will bring a perspective that is focused exclusively on those who are presenting with a high probability of a single serious or complex condition. It is a small percentage of people speaking for the majority. As family doctors we see patients with undifferentiated symptoms, with stable and well-managed chronic conditions, or with multimorbidity or social complexity,<sup>4</sup> and we engage in work related to population health. This broad scope and the lens it brings mean that, ultimately, ongoing family medicine research is vital to providing the "coherent and evolving body of knowledge" that the discipline of family medicine needs in order to exist.<sup>5</sup>

According to *Advancing Family Medicine Research in Canada: A Guidance Report for the CFPC's Future Role and Action*, which was accepted by the CFPC's Board of Directors in December 2023, "The ability to identify, study,

and cite our own evidence is essential to reaffirm the value and impact of primary care, including family medicine, on Canadians' health and the Canadian health care system."<sup>6</sup>

While most family physicians are not researchers, it is critical that we are all engaged with family medicine research in some way.

Participation in practice-based research and learning networks, where you can use the data found and shared within these groups for quality improvement in your own practice, is a powerful and easy way for family doctors to contribute to the formation of new knowledge and to provide the best possible care for their patients.

*Canadian Family Physician*, in addition to serving the needs of clinical readers, publishes Canadian family medicine research in every issue and has a quarterly space for Hypothesis articles to promote research. The research published includes work done by family medicine residents "getting their feet wet" in research as well as by highly funded, professional family medicine researchers.

Three great ways to learn more about family medicine research are through our SOR; NAPCRG (North American Primary Care Research Group)—the international primary care research organization that includes the CFPC as a partner<sup>7</sup>; and the WONCA Working Party on Research.<sup>8</sup> 🍁

### References

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