

Strength in family medicine research

New CFPC efforts identify opportunities and set priorities

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Canada is facing a “polycrisis” in primary care. People not having a family doctor,¹ the weight of administrative tasks in family practice,² family doctors feeling burned out,³ and the financial viability of family practices⁴ are among the issues that define the crisis. It has never been more important to consider the College of Family Physicians of Canada’s (CFPC’s) motto: *Nostrum in studiis robur* (in study lies our strength).⁵ This refers to family physicians’ dedication to lifelong learning as well as to processes of reflection and research that support the evolution of the discipline. There is strength in the study of family medicine, and research can be used to help navigate crises such as the one we currently face.

Research is part of family medicine

There is a continuum of research in family medicine, from the use of research findings in clinical practice to the engagement of family physicians as leaders of research projects.⁶ Skills such as literature review, critical appraisal, and interpretation and implementation of science apply to research and to clinical practice.⁷ Research takes many forms, with some researchers serving as clinical advisers on studies, others gathering and analyzing data, and others still leading the development and execution of large research projects.⁶ Research involves planned, rigorous studies that focus on family practice with the aim of improving clinical practice, health systems, and health policy to better support family practice and meet patients’ health care needs.

Research leadership from within family medicine

To be relevant to family practice contexts, research questions should be formulated by health care workers and patients within family practice. Participatory research requires those who are affected by research to be involved in it at all stages.⁸ Health care workers and patients know the circumstances of care and can skillfully formulate and test hypotheses about how to improve it.⁹ While family medicine integrates research from diverse fields and disciplines, it must also lead its own research to generate knowledge that is useful to the discipline and to practice.

Research at the CFPC

Recognizing that research is part of the discipline, the CFPC leads and supports the advancement of family medicine research. The CFPC sets out “to conduct, direct, encourage, support or provide for research in matters relating

to family medicine.”¹⁰ This foundational tenet underpins CFPC efforts to advance family medicine research.

The CFPC established the Section of Researchers (SOR) in 1995, opening new avenues of opportunity for members with research aspirations. The SOR aims to build capacity within and to advocate for family medicine research. The SOR Council and its action groups are composed of members who lead research across the country. The SOR provides a home for CFPC members who are committed to family medicine research.

The Foundation for Advancing Family Medicine (FAFM) is another important component of the family medicine research infrastructure in Canada.¹¹ The FAFM develops and coordinates the Honours and Awards Program, which administers funds available to CFPC members for research projects and celebrates accomplishments of family medicine researchers. These programs are overseen by the Honours and Awards Research Committee, a joint committee of the CFPC board and the FAFM board that advises the FAFM on program development and, through peer review and adjudication, recognizes and supports exceptional family medicine research.

The CFPC’s Research Department supports all College research activities and manages the SOR and the Honours and Awards Research Committee. Research content at the CFPC’s annual Family Medicine Forum is reviewed, selected, and programmed by the Family Medicine Forum Research Committee, which the Research Department also manages and supports. The Research Department connects research and quality improvement directors from departments of family medicine at universities across Canada, including through Research Connect, an online discussion and collaboration forum open to all CFPC members and delivered through the TimedRight platform.¹²

The CFPC carries out targeted research initiatives that support the work of the organization. The Education Evaluation and Research Unit leads the Family Medicine Longitudinal Survey, a rich source of data for studying family medicine education and practice.¹³ During the COVID-19 pandemic the FAFM supported targeted research through the COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Impact Grant Program, and the CFPC conducted surveys of members that showed how family practices and family physicians responded to and were affected by the pandemic.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ In 2021 the CFPC partnered with Associated Medical Services Healthcare to explore the impact of artificial intelligence on the provision of

compassionate care, with a focus on how to advance artificial intelligence research in family medicine.¹⁷ The CFPC also supports research proposals, providing letters of support and advisory input for studies that are highly relevant to family medicine. These activities are aimed at supporting CFPC members and at harnessing research to help family practices maximize the impact of care provided to patients and communities.

The CFPC's future role in family medicine research

The year 2024 marks an important time for family medicine research. In December 2023 the CFPC board approved a report (released in 2024) based on an extensive environmental scan and consultation to identify potential research roles and actions for the CFPC.¹⁸ In 2024 the SOR will update its 2018-2023 Blueprint¹⁹ to establish priorities and to chart a course for the future of family medicine research. These documents will inform the CFPC as it renews its corporate strategic plan and continues to advance family medicine research.

The CFPC and the SOR will engage with the family medicine research community to seek to further embed research as part of the profession. Confident that *in study lies our strength*, these efforts will amplify the impact of family medicine research in building a health system that works best for family practices and for the patients and communities they serve.

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Competing interests

None declared

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