

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Alberta Medical Foundation (AMF) 1987-2020

“To seek out that which is noble in our past and make it a living ideal”

To many members, the recent shift in the AMA's approach to the study of Alberta's medical history may not have been noticed. In 2020, the Alberta Medical Foundation (AMF) reverted to a committee of the AMA. The reorganization provided an opportunity to review what has been accomplished over the AMF's 33 years, the initiatives that need to be continued and what challenges should be addressed.

Older AMA members may recall that in 1980 the AMA's Committee on Archives, under Drs. Bill Shandro and Hugh Arnold, raised the idea of creating a fund to support the study of Alberta's medical history. The timing was perfect as the [AMA received an unrestricted donation of \\$312,500 from Dr. Margaret Hutton in 1983](#). Dr. Don Wilson secured the donation for that purpose.

The Alberta Medical Foundation

The Alberta Medical Foundation was formed in 1987. As interest rates were high relative to today, funds were accumulated for a chair in Calgary. The higher rates also permitted the AMF to contribute to other historical projects in larger amounts than it currently can.

The trust funds, which currently exceed \$700,000, have been transferred and will now be [managed by the Canadian Medical Foundation](#). Future donations from AMA members will continue to be added to it, just as they have been since 2012. Over \$100,000 has already been appreciatively donated by AMA members. The burden of annual fiscal and financial accounting will not be required. The Canada Revenue Agency formula that requires 4.5% of capital and 80% of any donations to be spent in the next fiscal year will still apply.

The past decisions of the AMF provide a blueprint for the incoming History of Medicine Committee (HOMC). A business plan will be needed because few physicians in the province have a long-term interest in its medical history and AMA committee membership is limited to three years with one renewal. I trust that my 40 years on the AMA's committees/boards will permit me to make some recommendations for the committee's future plan.

Alberta physicians have long provided national leadership, fostered change and helped adapt the profession to the changing health care expectations of Canadians. From an Alberta perspective, that story is under-recognized and under-told. For instance, who knows that the CMA's second Starr award recipient in 1938 was an Albertan, after Banting, Best and Collip collectively received it in 1935? It was not awarded again for another 10 years! Everyone believes medicare originated in Saskatchewan. Many books have been written on it because the medical insurance program takeover was adversarial. Who knows that medicare was designed in Alberta – cooperatively – as a health insurance program 10 years earlier? Devoid of rancor, little has been written about this happening.

Going Forward

AMF support for programs like the medical history program at the University of Calgary and its History of Medicine Days has continued for 30 years. They must remain a high priority. The University of Alberta program needs rejuvenation since the retirement of Dr. Dawna Gilchrist from the faculty in 2019. The recent AMF decision to fund more research projects needs expansion, too.

The medical component of the “our future our past” website, created by the AMF at the U of C, needs updating and a thought-out future plan developed and implemented to make the site the primary source for information on medicine in Alberta, as originally contemplated.

A funded chair in medical history in Edmonton is sorely needed. The Ontario experience, with five university/associated medical services chairs at all their medical schools (Hannah Foundation funded), proves much more can be accomplished with a funded chair. Generously, the AMS/Hannah Foundation contributed to the chair in Calgary, after the idea was raised by the AMF in 1994.

By comparison, the U of A Nursing and Physical Education faculties have always had one or more members of the faculty whose primary focus was on their history. Medicine, with its long history, has only a partially funded chair in Calgary, one that has benefitted from the AMF’s operational support.

Alberta’s recent medical accomplishments

In 1980, Drs. Don Wilson and Bill Parsons identified important medical topics in Alberta and wrote or had articles written on them. Their book, *Medicine in Alberta – Historical Reflections*, was published by the AMF in 1993 as part of the 75th anniversary historical initiative of the Lougheed government to create a record of community histories. The book is full of medical profiles that have never been catalogued. Only two dozen copies of the Wilson/Parsons book exist, and it has never been scanned. Further, that project is now 40 years out of date. Topics like STARS, the Calgary stroke unit’s international success, the value of the cardiovascular APPROACH data base, the AHFMR impact, the discovery of Lamivudine for Hepatitis B, the Edmonton Protocol, minocycline for MS, the proof that neurocells can regenerate ... are successes that need to be documented in a way that is understandable and can be shared with the public.

Biographies in waiting

Full-scale biographies of national medical pioneers like Robert Brett, A. E. Archer, John S. McEachern and George Kennedy are waiting to be written, like the recent one released on BC’s Dr. Horace Wrinch. More recent biographical profiles are needed of Drs. Tyrrell, Watanbe, Sproule, Dosseter, Haslam, Houghton, Collins-Nakai ... like the autobiography of Dr. Joseph Martin. They need commissioning, or we will lose their stories as well.

Missing AMA minutes

There also needs to be another look at trying to find the 30 years of missing AMA/CPSA proceedings from 1905 to 1935. Without them, there will be no AMA history written – the

only major Alberta medical institution still without one. Perhaps there are individual copies that have been donated to museums in the province that do not recognize their importance.

Clearly there is much to do. Prioritization is needed, as is delegating, partnering and identifying recent important medical topics to be documented. A larger trust fund is required, too, which could reduce the annual disbursement burden.

This blueprint can provide a starting point for the new committee, but it needs members of the profession who are interested taking on these challenges.

Acknowledgement and recognition are due to the past AMF board members, particularly the eight other presidents over the 33 years: Drs. Don Wilson, Gerry McDougall, Robert Fraser, Peter Allen, David Hogan, Dawna Gilchrist and Melanie Stapleton, as well as Dr. Margaret Hutton, whose bequest funded the AMF.

Banner image: Drs. Don Wilson and Bill Parsons identified important medical topics in Alberta and wrote or had articles written on them. Their book, *Medicine in Alberta – Historical Reflections*, was published by the AMF in 1993 as part of the 75th anniversary historical initiative of the Lougheed government to create a record of community histories.