

Family Medicine Researcher of the Year

Dr. Ann C. Macaulay

Dr. Ann C. Macaulay, whose work as a family physician, researcher, teacher and mentor has left an indelible mark on family medicine research in Canada, is the recipient of the CFPC Section of Researchers' Family Medicine Researcher of the Year Award for 2008.



Dr. Ann C. Macaulay, CM, MD, FCFP
Winner, CFPC Section of Researchers'
Family Medicine Researcher of the Year
Award 2008

Dr. Macaulay began her work in Canada as a family physician in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, south west of Montreal. Her interest in research, in true keeping with the focus of family medicine

research, surfaced while she cared for patients in the community. She and Dr. Louis Montour, another family physician in Kahnawake, documented a high prevalence of diabetes and high complication rates among people with diabetes in the community.

They brought their concerns to the community's elders, who asked Drs. Montour and Macaulay to help the community effect change that would help combat the potentially frightening future that residents faced. They launched a seven-year quest for funding, which led the development of the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (KSDPP), launched in 1994. The project was ground-breaking on several levels.

One of the first community-based diabetes prevention projects in Canada, the KSDPP led to the development of a health curriculum and nutrition policy in the community's schools as well as a recreation path to encourage physical activity, all focused on improving the health of children in the community.

As a model for academic research, the project was no less visionary. KSDPP incorporated the use of participatory research, a collaborative approach that involves community members (including patients, family members, advocates, academic researchers, policy makers and community members) as full participants on the research team. “The strength of participatory research is its ability to bring so many different people together, to develop a partnership in which research is conducted with those who are affected,” Dr. Macaulay explains. “All participants have expertise to contribute and have opportunities to gain knowledge as the research process unfolds,” she adds.

The project also incorporated and demonstrated the value of integrated knowledge translation. The ability to use and disseminate knowledge gained throughout the project was an important advancement in the practice of academic research, and is increasingly required as a condition of funding among health research supporters today.

Dr. Macaulay subsequently worked to garner recognition and acceptance of participatory research by the medical community. She led the task force for the North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG) and their description of participatory research in the British Medical Journal has been cited by the World Health Organisation, and now serves as a resource to the world.

The author of more than 50 articles and abstracts in peer-reviewed publications, she has also presented her research findings on diabetes among Aboriginal Canadians, the incorporation of cross-cultural and traditional care in treating Aboriginal peoples and the ethics of research with Aboriginal communities to national and international audiences.

Dr. Macaulay stepped down from her leadership position in Kahnawake in 2006 to become the inaugural director of the Participatory Research at McGill project (PRAM) in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University. PRAM’s mission is to help develop the use of participatory research in health care through the development of scholarship and education.

In addition to her work with PRAM, Dr. Macaulay is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Montreal. She continues her work supervising family medicine residents in the Department of Family Medicine, SMBD Jewish General Hospital and as a KSDPP research team member in Kahnawake.

One of only five foreign associates nominated to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies in 2005, Dr. Macaulay also holds the Order of Canada for her work in Aboriginal health and family medicine research. She has served in numerous leadership capacities and provided her professional and scientific expertise to research and primary care organizations and health care associations in Canada and around the world.

Ask Dr. Macaulay what has given her the most satisfaction in her career, and she will tell you it is the people with whom she has worked. She is most gratified by the students from Kahnawake who, inspired by their involvement in the KSDPP, have gone on to attain formal qualifications in health research. Two students have obtained Masters' degrees in health studies, and one student is completing her Ph.D. in Health Promotion. "It's very rewarding to see the accomplishments of these younger people," she says. "It was a direct result of working with KSDPP that they became interested and worked toward these goals."

Part of capacity building, to be sure. But without a doubt, Dr. Macaulay's work will continue as a direct result of the standards she has put in place throughout her career.