



Founding member of Médecins Sans Frontières Canada wins the Royal College's prestigious humanitarian award

March 30, 2016, OTTAWA — From characterizing the symptoms of HIV/AIDS in children, to enabling the delivery of affordable medicines, the humanitarian career of James Orbinski, OC, OOnt, MD, MCFP, has made the world a better place for millions of people. Due to the far-reaching impacts of his work, he has won one of Canada's most prestigious medical awards: the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's Teasdale-Corti Humanitarian Award.

Watch our short tribute video here: <https://youtu.be/8RkjfpJVPs>

Today, Dr. Orbinski works in Waterloo, Ont., where he is CIGI Chair in Global Health Governance at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University. He is also a professor at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

However, in the late eighties, he was one of few doctors working on the ground in Africa to characterize the signs and symptoms of HIV/AIDS in children. It was a time when very little was known.

"Mothers would line up in the hundreds outside the hospital and many had walked for two or three days to get there, bringing their children to be seen and cared for," said Dr. Orbinski. "The scale and scope of their need really struck me and I realized that a traditional approach was not going to work."

He responded by developing treatment algorithms for very common problems — fever, diarrhea, cough — in HIV-positive children. He taught these to local health care providers so that when he left the region, the children could still find relief.

"Since those early years, Dr. Orbinski has devoted his career to humanitarian medicine in famine, war and genocide, as well as developing new medicines, creating award-winning research and engaging others through advocacy and policy," said Royal College CEO Andrew Padmos, MD, FRCPC.

Dr. Orbinski then worked for many years in numerous countries with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), first as a physician, then medical director, then head of mission. The work was not easy — he was threatened at gunpoint in Somalia and survived shellfire in Rwanda during the genocide.

Eventually, he became MSF's international president and accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 on behalf of the organization.

He was also one of the founding members of MSF Canada, bringing it from "a spare desk in the basement" status to national recognition as a valuable member of the international MSF movement.

"In the spirit of the Teasdale-Corti award, Dr. Orbinski's body of work has made a worldwide impact to the quality of frontline medical care and the sustainability of health systems in developing countries," said Dr. Padmos.

For example, in 2003, Dr. Orbinski helped create with MSF the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative, an organization that has made a tremendous difference developing and delivering drugs to millions of people suffering from neglected diseases. These are diseases such as paediatric HIV and sleeping sickness, for which current treatments are insufficient, too expensive or difficult to administer on the ground.

He also co-founded Dignitas International, a non-governmental organization that is removing barriers to health care access in developing countries. Thanks to Dignitas, more than 250,000 people in Malawi are on full treatment for HIV. In addition, acclaimed research by the Dignitas team has revolutionized the treatment of pregnant women with HIV, reducing transmission to their children.

Some of Dr. Orbinski's co-authored research has been recognized by *The Lancet* as among the best in the world in 2006, and as having shaped scholarship in the field of global health.

"Dr. Orbinski is a profile of courage," said Toronto cardiologist Vivian Rambihar, MD, FRCPC, one of his nominators. "He exemplifies exceptionally what the Teasdale-Corti is all about. As physicians, we're always looking for role models and he is an exceptional one."

-30-

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