THE CANADIAN MEDICAL HALL OF FAME
Our History from 1994 – 2011

The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame (hereafter referred to as the “Hall”) was established in 1994 to create an enduring tribute to Canada’s medical heroes who through discovery and innovation have contributed to improved health in Canada and around the world. Three years later, in 1997, the Hall expanded its mission to include educational programs that serve to inspire the pursuit of careers in health sciences fostering future innovators and leaders.

The concept of a national Medical Hall of Fame was the brainchild of London’s famous organ transplant specialist, Dr. Calvin Stiller. Discussions began in 1992 and while Dr. Stiller remembers a voice or two saying “it was the the craziest thing they had ever heard”, the idea sparked the interest of several prominent medical and business leaders from the London community who were prepared to take steps to turn the idea into a reality.

First meetings got underway at the Robarts Research Institute in the fall of 1993 led by Dr. Stiller and Mr. J. Allyn Taylor (President of Canada Trust and Chair of the Robarts Research Institute), the two key drivers of the project. Other members included Mr. Bill Brady (radio broadcaster), Dr. Mark Poznansky (CEO of Robarts Research Institute), Dr. Ramsay Gunton (member of the Order of Canada), Mr. Richard Ivey (community philanthropist), and later, Dr. Robert McMurtry (Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Western Ontario) and Dr. Joseph Gilbert (Vice-President of Research, University Hospital).

A Laureate Selection Committee was also established at this time and chaired by Dr. Henry Friesen who was president of the Medical Research Council (MRC) in Ottawa at the time. It was felt that an endorsement from the MRC, in addition to an entirely independent selection process, would be instrumental in garnering attention for the Hall and ensure that it had a reputable identity in Canada’s medical community.

From the beginning, London was the frontrunner as the location to host the Hall, not only because the idea was championed there, but because of the city’s exemplary commitment to medical research, something that made J. Allyn Taylor in particular extremely proud. Dr. Henry Friesen recalls London as the only city in Canada at the time that had a ‘budget line’ dedicated to medical research. A proposal was put forward to establish a permanent gallery of the laureate portraits at the London Convention Centre.
By 1994, the Hall was operating temporarily out of the Robarts Research Institute and the London Convention Centre. It was chaired by a Board of Directors, administered by Executive Director Betsy Little, and was in the process of planning its first induction ceremony in conjunction with a symposium for leaders in the medical field. On May 27, 1994, over 250 guests came together at the London Convention Centre to celebrate the induction of the first ten laureates:

- Dr. James Bertram Collip
- Dr. Jacques Genest
- Dr. John Symonds Lyon Browne
- Dr. Charles George Drake
- Sir William Osler
- Dr. Douglas Harold Copp
- Dr. Wilder Graves Penfield
- Dr. Maude Elizabeth Seymour Abbott
- Dr. Frederick Grant Banting
- Dr. Charles Herbert Best

As Selection committee chair Dr. Henry Friesen recalls,

“There was a sense of nervousness and anticipation. There was a “buzz” in the room and it was crowded. J. Allyn Taylor spoke passionately about his personal commitment to the Hall of Fame. It was a truly remarkable parade of laureates, including Dr. Banting whose son received the award on his behalf. Dr. Banting’s son, a shy soft-spoken man, told the story of when he was a young boy and his father took him to a park in London to tell him that he was leaving for the war to fight as an air pilot. They said goodbye and that was the last time that Dr. Banting’s son saw his father…You could hear a pin drop and from that moment on The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame was forever-established”.

By late 1994, despite the strong support of many politicians and public representatives, the Hall experienced a major setback when the promised municipal funding to establish a permanent site fell through. The City was dealing with major cutbacks and thus had to forego financial support for the organization. In response, the Board unanimously decided to move its office space and portrait gallery from the London Convention Centre to another location. The administrative office was moved to the Siebens Drake Research Institute at the University of Western Ontario in April 1995. The portrait gallery was relocated to Museum London – then named the London Regional Art and Historical Museum. While at Museum London, the number of laureates grew from 17 to 49.

Between 1996 and 2003, the Hall was involved in several local community events including the presentation of the Banting-Jackson display at Museum London in 1997. That same year, the Hall launched its first youth symposium at the University of Western Ontario, marking the beginning of the highly-successful national program that later became known as Discovery Days in Health Sciences. By 2011, eleven universities and colleges across Canada were hosting Discovery Day giving over 2,200 secondary students the opportunity to explore their career options in the health sciences.

After the successful capital campaign of 2003, the Hall opened its doors at the J. Allyn Taylor building – formerly a Canada Trust-Toronto Dominion Bank – on the southwest corner of Wellington and Dundas Streets. The heritage-designated building had been donated to the City of London by TD Bank and dedicated to J. Allyn Taylor and therefore, was a fitting site for the Hall. Soon after the move, Executive Director Betsy Little left her position. She was replaced in quick succession by Sherry Foster and then interim leader Ted Eadinger who was also a Board Member. Finally, in 2006 Janet Tufts was brought on as the Executive Director and remains there to this day.

To date, the Hall has become a well-known national institution through the hard work of its Board of Directors. Members include:

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<td>Jean Gray</td>
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The Laureate Selection Committee has always existed as a separate entity ‘at arm’s length’ from the Board of Director. Notable members include:

- Dr. Alan Beaudet (Chair 2008-2011)
- Sir John Bell
- Dr. Alan Bernstein (Chair 2001-2007)
- Dr. Carol Cass
- Dr. Michael Chretien
- Dr. George Connell
- Dr. Henry Friesen (Chair 1994-2000)
- Dr. Richard Goldbloom
- Dr. Murray Goldstein
- Dr. Joseph Martin
- Dr. Colin McMilan
- Dr. Fraser Mustard
- Dr. Reginald Nadeau
- Dr. David Naylor
- Dr. David Sackett
- Dr. Michael Smith
- Dr. Dominique Tessier
- Dr. Aubrey Tingle
- Dr. Catharine Whiteside

As 2011 draws to a close, all those who have been involved with The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame over the years can look back on its creation with extraordinary pride. The credential of a laureate has become a treasured and respected honour spoken in the same breath as the Order of Canada and Royal Society. Not only that, Canada is the only country in the world with a Hall of Fame dedicated to recognizing its medial heroes. As a nation typically viewed as humble and unassuming, initiatives such as this that serve to celebrate our accomplishments are to be congratulated.

In 2012, the Hall will embark on the most comprehensive strategic planning process in the organization’s history. Reflecting back over the first 17 years and the organization’s remarkable transformation from a London-focused entity to a truly national institution, it is exciting to imagine what the next 17 years will bring.