

DALHOUSIE'S  
FACULTY OF  
MEDICINE  
ALUMNI  
PUBLICATION

SPRING 2026

# DalDocs



## ***A LIFE OF PURPOSE, A LASTING INFLUENCE***

Dr. Noni MacDonald reflects on service, social accountability, and being honoured by Dalhousie

***DR. DAVID ANDERSON REFLECTS ON LEADERSHIP,  
PARTNERSHIPS, AND THE FUTURE OF DALHOUSIE MEDICINE***

***A HOME FOR PUBLIC HEALTH:  
NEW DALHOUSIE AND NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH DIVISION***

***A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE DMAA ALUMNI AWARDS***

# SAVE THE DATE

**NOVEMBER 7, 2026**

This year, the Dal Med Gala will be an enhanced DMAA Alumni Recognition Awards celebration for all alumni.

## DalDocs

### SPRING 2026

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**Editors:** Emily Brown, Elizabeth Conrad & Jason Bremner

**Contributors:** Kate Rogers, Dayna Park & Emily Brown

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Jill Caldwell

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Daniel Abriel, Nick Pearce, other images contributed

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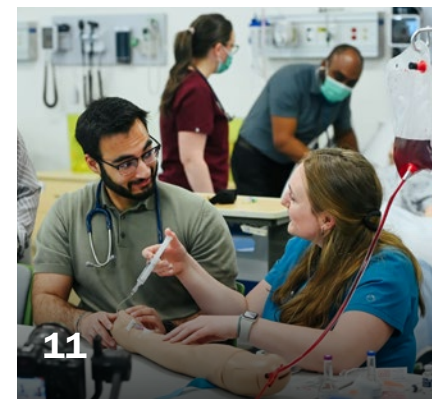
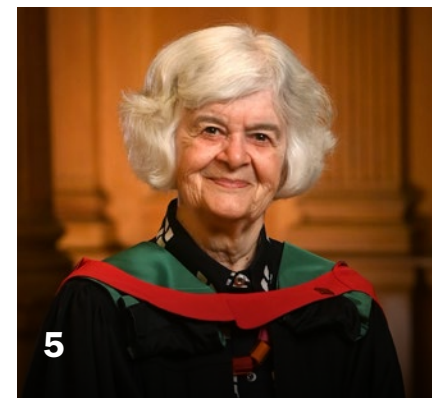
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In this issue of Dal Docs, we mark a moment of both momentum and transition for Dalhousie Medicine. This is my final message as Dean, and I want to begin by sharing how deeply grateful I am for the privilege of serving this extraordinary community.

Working alongside our students, staff, faculty, and alumni has been the greatest honour of my career. Your dedication, kindness, and commitment have inspired me every day, and I am profoundly thankful for all that we have accomplished together.

I am also pleased to welcome Dr. Saleem Razack as Dalhousie's incoming Dean of Medicine. I know you will extend to him the same warmth, collegiality, and support that you have so generously shown me throughout my tenure. The Faculty of Medicine is an environment where people feel welcomed, valued, and inspired, and I am confident Dr. Razack will experience that from his very first day.

Since our last issue, our community has continued to demonstrate remarkable achievement. In November we gathered to celebrate at the Dalhousie Medicine Gala and alumni awards. It was great to see such an incredible turnout as we recognized excellence across the Faculty of Medicine.

In December we celebrated the first graduates of Dalhousie's Master of Physician Assistant Studies program as they stepped into practice and began shaping the future of care in our region. These trailblazing students displayed such resilience and professionalism, navigating the challenges of a new program while demonstrating their commitment to compassion, team-based care. Their journey **from classroom to clinic** marks a transformative moment for healthcare in Nova Scotia, and I am confident that their skills and dedication will make a lasting impact on the communities they serve.

We have also marked important leadership transitions within the Faculty of Medicine. In December we offered our sincere thanks to Ms. Linda Penny for her outstanding service as Chief Operating Officer and welcomed Dr. Shawna O'Hearn into this role. Dr. Stephanie Langley began her role as senior associate dean, Cape Breton Medical Campus in January, bringing extensive experience in family medicine education and health-system leadership; we thank Dr. Jennifer Hall for her foundational leadership in establishing CBMC. Dr. Marc Nicholson was appointed assistant dean of professional affairs, DMNB, effective February 1, and Dr. Nabha Shetty as assistant dean of professional affairs, DMNS, effective March 1. We acknowledge and thank both Drs. Samantha Gray and Ian Epstein for their important contributions as the inaugural professional affairs deans at our DMNB and DMNS campuses.



**David Anderson (MD '83)**  
*Dean, Faculty of Medicine*

On May 29, we celebrated the hard work and accomplishments of the Class of 2026 at the Faculty of Medicine convocation. This day is always filled with excitement, and I congratulate our students on all they have achieved.

As we look ahead, our momentum remains strong. Across education, research, and leadership, there is much to celebrate and even more to look forward to. As this chapter comes to a close for me, I do so with deep pride in what we have built together and great confidence in the future of Dalhousie Medicine.

**Dr. David Anderson (MD '83)**  
Dean of Medicine

As another academic year draws to a close, convocation offers a meaningful moment to reflect, celebrate, and look ahead. I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the Class of 2026. This milestone marks not only the culmination of years of dedication and perseverance, but also the beginning of your lifelong connection to Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine. You now join a proud and engaged community of alumni who continue to shape healthcare locally and around the world.

This year's convocation was especially significant as we celebrated the inaugural graduates of the Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) program. Having completed their program in December 2025, this first cohort crossed the stage on May 29 alongside our medical graduates! This is a moment that reflects the continued evolution and strength of team-based care, and the growing impact of Dalhousie-trained healthcare professionals.

Convocation also provides an opportunity to recognize leadership and legacy. This June, we extend our sincere thanks and best wishes to Dr. David Anderson (MD'83), who is concluding his second term as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine after serving since 2015. Dr. Anderson's steady leadership, deep commitment to medical education, and dedication to the Dalhousie community have left a lasting mark. On a personal note, it has been a privilege to work alongside him and to call him a colleague and friend.

It has been another vibrant year for the Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association. We were proud to host a well-attended reception at the International Congress on Academic Medicine (ICAM) in Ottawa, bringing together alumni, faculty, and learners from across the country. In November, more than 700 members of our community gathered for the 2025 Dal Med Gala, an evening that continues to grow as a cornerstone event, celebrating excellence through the DMAA Awards while fostering connection across generations. The annual Fun Walk/Run also brought energy and camaraderie to the weekend, reminding us of the importance of wellness and community in our profession.

The DMAA is also strengthened by the passion and commitment of alumni who choose to get involved. As we approach June, we will have a handful of openings on the DMAA Board, and I encourage those who are interested in contributing to the direction and impact of our alumni community to consider putting their name forward. Serving on the Board is a rewarding way to stay connected, support future generations, and help shape the ongoing work of the Association. If you would like to learn more, please reach out to [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca). We would be pleased to hear from you!

As we move into the summer and fall, reunion season is upon us. I would like to extend congratulations and best wishes to all alumni celebrating milestone reunions in the coming months. These occasions are a powerful reminder of the shared experiences that



**Stephen G Miller (MD '93)**  
*Senior Associate Dean, Medical Education*

connect us, and the enduring relationships formed during our time at Dalhousie. Thank you as well to the many volunteers and organizers who make these gatherings possible.

This message also marks a personal transition. As my term comes to a close, this will be my final welcome message as President of the DMAA. It has been an absolute honour to serve this community. I am confident that the Association is in excellent hands as I pass the role to Dr. Annette Bell (MD'97), our incoming President. I look forward to supporting the DMAA in my new role as Past President and to seeing the continued growth and impact of our alumni network under her leadership.

Thank you for staying connected, for supporting one another, and for continuing to represent Dalhousie with such distinction. I wish you all a safe, relaxing and restorative summer.

With my best personal regards,

**Stephen G Miller, MD, CCFP(EM), FCFP, MEd, DRCPSC (Clin Ed) (he/him)**  
President, Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association (2024-2026)  
Senior Associate Dean, Medical Education  
Professor, Emergency Medicine

As we complete another academic year, I want to take a moment to reflect on several important milestones and updates across Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick.

Our leadership team continues to evolve in ways that strengthen and support our community. In February, Dr. Marc Nicholson (MD'02), a pediatrician based in Saint John, was appointed Assistant Dean, Professional Affairs, DMNB. I would also like to recognize Dr. Lisa Sutherland (MD'90, PGM' 92 & BSC'86), who will be completing her second term as Assistant Dean, Student and Resident Affairs at the end of June. She has been a strong advocate for learners across DMNB, and I am deeply grateful for her dedication and service. We wish her all the best as she prepares for retirement. I am also pleased to share that Dr. Keith Wilson has been appointed Assistant Dean, Student and Resident Affairs, DMNB, effective July 1, 2026. Dr. Wilson is a family physician in Saint John, New Brunswick, and we look forward to welcoming him to the leadership team. Dr. Margaret Relja will also complete her term as Fredericton Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship Director at the end of June, and preparations are underway to identify her successor. Thank you to Dr. Relja for her leadership.

This spring also provided meaningful opportunities to celebrate our learners and their achievements. DMNB students proudly hosted the 2026 Conference of Atlantic Medical Students (CoAMS) in Saint John in early May, welcoming peers from across the region and showcasing the leadership and engagement of our student community.

I extend my congratulations as well to all members of the Class of 2026 and to those completing residency training programs in New Brunswick. We wish each of you continued success as you move forward in your careers. Several signature events mark this important transition period. Our annual DMNB Launch Ceremony took place May 8th, for our 13th graduating class, at the Imperial Theatre in Saint John, followed by Convocation and Awards ceremonies for the entire Dal Med Class of 2026 on May 29 in Halifax. These ceremonies remain powerful moments to recognize the commitment and achievements of our graduates.

We are also pleased with our most recent CaRMS residency match results. At present, the DMNB Class of 2026 achieved a 53 per cent family medicine match rate, and 47 per cent Royal College match rate, with 63 per cent of graduates choosing to remain at Dalhousie for residency training. These outcomes reflect the strength of our programs and our ongoing commitment to training physicians to serve our region.

I would like to extend congratulations to our UGME Manager, Kim Wilms, who was recently recognized by the Dalhousie Medical Students' Society with the Hippocratic Pinecone Plaque. This award acknowledges individuals who have made significant and lasting contributions to undergraduate medical education, and it is a fitting recognition of Kim's dedication and impact. I would also



**Dr. Julie Copeland**  
*Senior Associate Dean, Dalhousie Medicine  
New Brunswick*

like to congratulate two members of the DMNB community who were recognized through the 2026 Faculty of Medicine Awards of Excellence. Dr. Lisa Sutherland, Assistant Dean, Student and Resident Affairs, DMNB, received the Award of Excellence in Academic Leadership, while Nick Lignos, Communications and Community Impact Advisor, DMNB, received the Award of Excellence in Emerging Leadership. These honours reflect their exceptional commitment and contributions to our faculty and community.

Research excellence at DMNB continues to thrive. In December, we were proud to host the first Breakthrough Breakfast in Saint John, bringing a long-standing Faculty of Medicine research celebration to our New Brunswick community. This event highlighted the vital role research plays in improving health outcomes and strengthening our communities, while showcasing the outstanding work of DMNB researchers across areas such as cardiovascular health, cancer, population health, social medicine, and emergency and primary care. Thank you to our DMNB speakers Drs. Paul Atkinson, Keith Brunt, Duncan Webster (MD'01 & PGM'07), and PhD candidate Tori Nelson.

As always, thank you to our faculty, staff, learners, and partners for your continued commitment to Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick. Your collective efforts ensure that DMNB remains a dynamic and impactful distributed medical education community.

**Dr. Julie Copeland**  
Senior Associate Dean, Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick

It's a pleasure to have joined the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine as the Senior Associate Dean of the Cape Breton Medical Campus (CBMC). Since joining the CBMC in January 2026, I've been inspired by the faculty, staff and medical learners who are dedicated to advancing health and health care in rural Nova Scotia.

In the fall of 2025, CBMC was selected as the site for the annual Faculty of Medicine's retreat. Among her last official duties as Senior Associate Dean before her retirement in December 2025, Dr. Jennifer Hall welcomed colleagues from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to the event. As the newest distributed education site, the CBMC team embraced the opportunity to host this event and build on our shared vision. Common themes included excellence in distributed medical education and our commitment to social accountability.

As family doctors in small communities, we remain connected to the communities we serve. This takes many forms. In March, we hosted a Family Physician Career Fair, inviting local doctors to meet CBMC students in a trade show style event, with display booths highlighting the array of specialties within the practice of family medicine. The event was a great success, engaging the inaugural class of the CBMC in conversations with local doctors around their future careers in family medicine.

As a significant milestone, CBMC's inaugural students recently completed their Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) for Med 1. Thanks to our dedicated faculty and staff, the OSCE was well organized, providing students with a professional clinical environment and the training to succeed.

We will continue to celebrate family medicine and the CBMC's rural pathway during the official opening of the CBMC campus, with construction approaching completion. Located on the CBU Campus, the new medical sciences building features a full anatomy lab, along with advanced technology to support the distributed education model we collectively champion. Soon, we will promote the CBMC's inaugural class to Med 2 and welcome the next cohort, the class of 2030. We do so with a growing team that includes faculty and staff and a state-of-the-art facility to support our success. We are grateful for Dr. Jennifer Hall's foundational work, and for the partnership with colleagues in Halifax and New Brunswick as we work together to deliver excellence in medical education.

**Dr. Stephanie Langley**  
Senior Associate Dean, Cape Breton Medical Campus



**Dr. Stephanie Langley (MD '95)**  
*Senior Associate Dean,  
Cape Breton Medical Campus*



◀ Dr. Noni MacDonald receiving her honorary degree at the medicine convocation on Friday May 29, 2026

## A Life of Purpose, A Lasting Influence

Dr. Noni MacDonald reflects on service, social accountability, and being honoured by Dalhousie



When Dr. Noni MacDonald learned she would receive an honorary doctorate from Dalhousie University this spring, her first reaction was disbelief.

“One truly does not expect to receive such an accolade,” she says, “especially from an institution that has been so central to one’s life’s work.”

The honour arrived at a deeply personal moment. Shortly after receiving the letter from Dalhousie’s president, Dr. Kim Brooks, in January 2025, Dr. MacDonald learned her husband, Doug, was nearing the end of his life. In a gesture of compassion, arrangements were made for her to receive the degree privately at home, alongside Dean David Anderson, so Doug could be present. He passed away just four days later.

“To receive it now formally at convocation is so lovely,” she says, “but also a little bittersweet.”

That mix of gratitude and reflection is characteristic of a career defined not by accolades, but by purpose.

### Solving the problems in front of you

Over five decades as a clinician, researcher, educator, and global health leader, Dr. MacDonald has followed one guiding principle: address the problems you can see, whether at the bedside, in the community, or on the global stage.

“All I have ever done was try to address problems that I saw,” she says. “If there was no evidence, then you ask a good research question, and you find the evidence.”

That approach has shaped an extraordinary career. A professor of pediatrics at Dalhousie, Dr. MacDonald has published hundreds of peer reviewed papers, advised the World Health Organization on vaccination policy, helped shape global immunization strategies, and co founded the MicroResearch Institute—a Dal based initiative that trains local health workers to investigate and solve problems in their own communities.

Equity, social accountability, evidence based decision making, and deep respect for patients, families, and communities have been the values that consistently guide her work.

“Patients and communities often have great insight into what the real problems are,” she says. “You just have to listen well and never give up, even when the going gets tough.”

### Making history at Dalhousie

Dr. MacDonald’s connection to Dalhousie runs deep. In 1999, she became Canada’s first female dean of medicine, arriving with a determination to push the Faculty of Medicine toward a stronger sense of social accountability.

She believed that medical education, clinical care, and research should be accountable to and explicitly shaped by the needs of the communities that physicians serve, from urban centres to rural and underserved regions.

At the time, the idea was far from mainstream.

“When I first presented it to the other deans of medicine across Canada, I was almost laughed out of the room,” she recalls. “And here was a woman saying we all needed to do this.”

But history proved the idea prescient. What was once dismissed is now foundational: social accountability is an accreditation standard for every medical school in Canada.

“That remains one of the most important changes I helped make happen, first at Dal, and then across the country,” she says.

### Trust, vaccines, and community driven change

Much of Dr. MacDonald’s career has focused on vaccines, not just their development and safety, but the trust required for public health programs to succeed.

“This is what equity is all about,” she says. “Real change happens when communities understand and support it.”

Whether addressing vaccine hesitancy, improving communication with frontline providers, or shaping global immunization strategy, her work has been rooted in collaboration, evidence, and a belief that sustainable solutions must be built with people, not imposed on them.

That same philosophy underpins the MicroResearch program, now an institute at Dalhousie, which she co founded in 2008. Modelled loosely on microfinance, the program provides small grants, mentorship, and training to local teams so they can conduct research that fits their context, culture, and resources.

It is no coincidence that MicroResearch has taken root at Dalhousie, an institution whose values align closely with her own.

### A message to the next generation

As she prepares to be honoured alongside graduating students at the upcoming convocation, Dr. MacDonald knows what she wants

emerging physicians and health leaders to remember.

“You have immense privilege and immense opportunity,” she says. “As a physician, you can make a difference not only in individual lives, but in the health and well-being of entire communities.”

That belief in responsibility, service, and using one’s skills to create meaningful change has shaped her career at every stage. Receiving an honorary doctorate from Dalhousie is deeply meaningful, she says, not as validation, but as reflection.

“It’s never about recognition,” she adds quietly. “It’s about doing the work that needs to be done.”

The Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine celebrated Dr. Noni MacDonald at a reception held on May 19, 2026, in advance of her honorary degree at Convocation.

The informal gathering in the Tupper Lobby brought together colleagues, faculty, staff, and members of the community to recognize her achievements and mark the occasion. She was formally honoured with an honorary degree at Convocation on May 29, 2026.



Dr. David Anderson and Dr. Noni MacDonald at her Honorary Degree Reception

## Passing the Torch: Honouring DMAA Member, Dr. Peggy Leighton (MD'77)



After more than a decade of dedicated service to the Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association (DMAA), Dr. Peggy Leighton (MD'77), will retire from the Board of Directors this June.

Her tenure has been marked by thoughtful leadership, deep institutional knowledge, and an unwavering commitment to strengthening connections across Dalhousie's medical alumni community.

### A journey of service and leadership

From her early involvement in the 1980s to her return in 2014 and continued service through multiple leadership roles, Dr. Leighton's impact on the DMAA has been both enduring and transformative.

"I was asked to join in June 2014," she recalls, "and in 2016 I was asked to do the two-year stint as Vice President of the DMAA, during which time we [with Dr. John Steeves (MD'74) as the DMAA President] updated the constitution and bylaws and modified the rules and regulations."

Her leadership continued as President of the DMAA board from 2018 to 2020, where she played a central role in planning milestone events, including Dalhousie Medicine's 150th and 151st anniversary galas. Following her presidency, she served as Past President from 2020 to 2022, chairing both the nominations committee and the DMAA Recognition Alumni Awards committee.

In recent years, Dr. Leighton has remained an active member-at-large, serving as what she describes as the board's "historical memory," a role other board members and staff have come to rely on.

### Championing growth and inclusion

Among her many contributions, Dr. Leighton takes particular pride in helping shape a more inclusive and representative board.

"When I joined the executive, we were all from Halifax and all graduates of the 1970s," she notes. "My initial goal was to involve younger members from more recent decades... I saw this gap and wanted to increase diversity and broaden geographic representation."

This vision helped lay the groundwork for the more diverse and representative DMAA board seen today, an evolution that continues to guide the organization's priorities.

### Moments that matter

Dr. Leighton's time with the DMAA is filled with meaningful memories, but a few stand out.

One highlight was her involvement in organizing the Dal Med 150 Gala in 2018, a landmark celebration that brought together a total of 1,200 alumni, faculty, students, and friends.

"The sellout crowd... dancing to Big Fish music, with the building swaying and the windows moving—I will never forget that night," she says.

The event not only celebrated Dalhousie's history but also set a new standard for alumni engagement, with elements including interactive spaces, social programming, and expanded reunion activities, many of which continue to shape alumni events and experiences today.

She also reflects fondly on her work with the alumni awards committee, particularly during the pandemic.

"I loved calling recipients of the alumni recognition awards," she shares, recalling the 2021 Alum of the Year recognition shared by four female provincial Chief Medical Officers of Health who guided their jurisdictions through COVID-19. "Sadly, the awards were handed out virtually, but it was still incredibly meaningful."

### A deep-rooted connection to Dalhousie

Dr. Leighton's connection to Dalhousie Medicine runs deep and spans generations of her family.

"I come from a medical family," she explains, noting that her grandfather, Dr. Duncan MacRae, graduated from Dalhousie Medicine in 1906 after working in the Cape Breton coal mines, and her father, Dr. Donald MacRae (MD' 34 & BSC' 30), later followed in his footsteps, graduating in 1934 from Dalhousie, later started the Ophthalmology residency program at Dalhousie and was the chief of ophthalmology for many years.

Today, that legacy continues with 12 members of her family across generations who have medical degrees from Dalhousie including two of her children and one who has a nursing degree from Dalhousie.



*Drs. Mary Doyle, Peggy Leighton, Cindy Forbes, Margaret Casey. Three of whom served as previous DMAA Presidents*

### The heart of the DMAA

For Dr. Leighton, the true value of the DMAA lies in its ability to bring people together.

"The most rewarding part has been meeting and connecting with other alumni," she reflects.

She has seen firsthand how the organization has evolved over the years, from expanding reunions and enhancing communications to increasing support for class initiatives and strengthening engagement across campuses, including the Cape Breton Medical Campus and Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick.

"The DMAA connects with medical learners right from the beginning of their medical education until they graduate," she says. "There have been so many initiatives over the last ten years that have enhanced the alumni community."

Words of encouragement for the next generation

As she prepares to step away from the board, Dr. Leighton encourages fellow alumni to stay connected and get involved.

"I would strongly encourage any alumni who are interested to get involved and put a step forward to volunteer," she says. "There's now an orientation package that really helps you once you start to get a handle on things."

She also highlights the collaborative spirit of the DMAA, noting the contributions of fellow alumni and the ongoing support of staff in helping alumni initiatives succeed.

### Looking Ahead

Dr. Leighton's legacy is one of continuity, care, and community. Her deep knowledge of the DMAA's history, combined with her forward-thinking approach to inclusion and engagement, has helped shape the organization into what it is today.

As she retires from the board, her influence will continue to be felt, in the programs she helped build, the people she mentored, and the connections she fostered across generations of Dalhousie medical alumni.

## Get Involved with the DMAA

The DMAA Board is strengthened by alumni from a wide range of backgrounds and career stages. If you are interested in contributing your ideas, experience, and enthusiasm to support Dal Med alumni, we'd love to hear from you.

To learn more about future opportunities to serve, contact [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca).



◀ *Dr. David Anderson, Dr. Bob Lea, Dr. Merv Shaw and Dr. Stephen Miller. Drs. Lea and Shaw accepting the 200K Cup at the 2024 Dal Med Gala on behalf of the MD 1965 class*

## Dr. Mervin Shaw (MD'65): A Life of Service, Creativity, and Enduring Impact



The Faculty of Medicine is saddened by the passing of Dr. Mervin (Merv) Shaw (MD'65), who died on February 24, 2026, in Halifax.

A respected physician, alumnus, and longstanding contributor to the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine

community, Dr. Shaw leaves behind a legacy shaped not only by his medical practice, but also by decades of quiet leadership, creativity, and deep commitment to his classmates, colleagues, and the Faculty of Medicine.

### A physician rooted in care and community

After graduating from Dalhousie Medical School in 1965, Dr. Shaw went on to practice family medicine for more than 25 years. He became widely respected for his thoughtful, compassionate approach to patient care and his steady commitment to the communities he served. He later continued his leadership in medicine as Medical Director of the Workers' Compensation Board, contributing to health care beyond the clinic in meaningful and lasting ways.

Those who knew him often spoke not only of his professional accomplishments but also of his presence, which was described as curious, engaged, and genuinely interested in people.

Dr. Sanford Berens (MD'65) reflected on his years alongside him in medical school, "I remember Merv as a friendly, easygoing but serious student, a genuinely warm classmate for five years we spent together at Dal. I am certain he carried those qualities forward during his years in practice."

That sense of warmth and steadiness would come to define how many remembered him across decades of involvement with Dalhousie Medicine.

### A lifelong commitment to Dalhousie Medicine

Dr. Shaw remained closely connected to Dalhousie throughout his life. For more than 30 years, he served as an active and dedicated member of the Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association (DMAA), contributing to many capacities, including board leadership and service as President from 1992 to 1994.

His impact extended well beyond governance. He was a consistent advocate for strengthening the ties between alumni, students, and the Faculty of Medicine, and believed deeply in the importance of maintaining those connections long after graduation.

Dr. Tony Measham (MD'65) and class president captured Dr. Shaw's essence of that contribution by writing, "Dr. Shaw was

an outstanding member of the Class of 1965. I can think of no classmate who contributed more to Dalhousie Medicine than Merv. In addition to his excellent family practice and leadership of the Workers' Compensation Board, he devoted decades of excellent service to DMAA. He was a gifted craftsman, an excellent athlete, and a gifted speaker. No one made a greater contribution to his medical classmates. He will be sorely missed by his classmates, not to mention his large and loving family."

For many of his classmates, Dr. Shaw represented continuity, a living link across generations of Dalhousie Medicine.

### The Silver Shovel and a culture of teaching recognition

Among Dr. Shaw's most visible and enduring contributions is the Silver Shovel Award, presented annually at Convocation to recognize excellence in teaching.

What began as a class discussion about how to meaningfully honour teachers evolved into a longstanding tradition within the Faculty of Medicine and one that continues to celebrate educators who shape the next generation of physicians.

Dr. Colin Mackenzie (MD'65), who was part of the group that originally established the award, reflected on its origins and meaning:

"I was part of the group that established this award. At the time, we felt there were a number of excellent teachers whom the medical school did not fully appreciate. The award was our way of bringing them to the school's attention—and, of course, of encouraging other members of the medical staff to aspire to win our Shovel."

Dr. Mackenzie continued, "The original shovel itself was quite ordinary, except that we had it chromium-plated. We chose a shovel because it is one of the earliest tools of humankind in its striving toward civilization... For many years, the large shovel hung on the wall of the hospital lecture room."

Within that history sits Dr. Shaw's lasting influence, not only as a participant in the award's early development, but as someone who helped ensure the Silver Shovel Award became a celebrated Convocation tradition. Established by the MD Class of 1965, the award recognizes faculty members who demonstrate dedication, compassion, and a deep commitment to medical students. Dr. Shaw also hand-carved elements of the trophy itself, leaving a lasting mark on one of Dalhousie Medicine's most meaningful student honours.

### Creativity, craft, and the human side of medicine

Dr. Shaw was also known for his remarkable creativity and craftsmanship, which became woven into several enduring Dalhousie traditions. Among them was his work supporting the Gold-Headed Cane tradition, where he hand-carved canes presented annually in recognition of humanitarian service in medicine.

Across the Faculty of Medicine, he was remembered for blending intellect with humour and artistry with qualities that

made his contributions distinctive and deeply personal.

Dr. Shaw was widely described as someone who brought warmth and wit into every space he entered. Colleagues recalled his storytelling, his humour, and his ability to connect with people across disciplines and generations.

### A Legacy That Continues

Dr. Mervin Shaw will be remembered as a physician, alumnus, mentor, and craftsman whose contributions helped shape both the culture and traditions of Dalhousie Medicine. Through his decades of service to the DMAA, his support of teaching recognition, and his enduring commitment to his classmates and colleagues, he leaves behind a legacy that continues to be felt each year at Convocation and beyond.

We extend our sincere condolences to his family, friends, classmates, and all who had the privilege of knowing him.



Designed to continue being presented until 2056, the current **Silver Shovel Award** was created by the MD Class of 1965. With the assistance of Dr. Barry Yoell (MD'66), who commissioned the sterling silver shovel, and Dr. Mervin Shaw, who built the wooden base and hand-carved its distinctive pine cone and serpent details, the award became a lasting symbol of Dalhousie Medicine tradition.

# From classroom to clinic

## Dalhousie's first physician assistant cohort steps into Nova Scotia's healthcare system

Diwan Minocha didn't set out to become a physician assistant—he discovered the profession by chance, thanks to a family tip and a curiosity for new possibilities in healthcare. Now, as part of Dalhousie's first Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) cohort and recent graduate, he's helping shape the future of medicine in Nova Scotia.

Growing up in Amherst, Nova Scotia, Diwan Minocha was initially set on medical school. It was only after graduating from Mount Allison University and diving into research that he discovered the career PA profession and the opportunity to be part of a new wave of healthcare delivery in his home province. He was drawn to the flexibility and scope of the role, and the two-year training program.

"Last spring I completed an internal medicine rotation at the Colchester Hospital," Minocha shared. "It's a catch-all rotation where I was exposed to all kinds of medicine, and everyone was extremely welcoming."

Minocha has also completed clinical rotations in pediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, family medicine, psychiatry, and endocrinology, gaining experience in specialized clinics, inpatient units, and operating rooms across the province.

Research and experience consistently show that when students live and train in communities, especially rural or underserved areas, they're more likely to return and practice there after graduation.

"Our students have been welcomed into clinical settings and have participated in several interprofessional education experiences with allied health and medical students," says Dr. Mike Clory (MD'91 & MBA'93), assistant dean of physician assistant studies. "Feedback from clinical preceptors has been extremely positive, with preceptors from various medical disciplines expressing interest in adding PAs to their care teams."

### A difference in delivery

The inaugural Dalhousie MPAS class began their studies in January 2024 and have since graduated this past May. The first of its kind in the Maritime provinces, the MPAS program provides graduates with the competencies needed to provide compassionate, evidence-based care and significantly contribute to interprofessional healthcare teams, alleviating some of the burdens faced by our healthcare system.

Physician assistants are medically trained professionals who work alongside physicians and other healthcare providers to deliver high-quality, team-based care. Dalhousie's MPAS program offers a rigorous two-year curriculum that prepares students for clinical practice through intensive training in diagnosis, treatment planning, pharmacology, and surgical procedures.

A key strength of the program is its focus on hands-on learning through clinical rotations. Taking place in hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare settings across Nova Scotia, these placements allow students to work directly with patients under the supervision of experienced physicians and PAs. From primary care to emergency departments, students apply their skills in real-world environments, gaining broad exposure and preparing them for the diverse challenges of modern healthcare.

*"The goal for a lot of students in my class was to try to make effective change in the program so that future classes would have smooth transitions and be able to focus their attention on learning how to be a good PA."*

— DIWAN MINOCHA



MPAS graduate Diwan Minocha

"I am quite proud of the job our MPAS faculty and administration team has done to launch this program," says Dr. Clory. "It is very satisfying to see the growth of our students, and I believe they will make a difference in the delivery of healthcare to our community."

### Finding their calling

Before donning scrubs and stepping into operating rooms, Heather Chigora was supporting the pharmacy team, helping to ensure smooth operations and high-quality patient care.

The recent MPAS graduate worked as a pharmacy assistant prior to beginning the program and had always been drawn to healthcare. It was through her close work with pharmacists, nurses, and physicians that she was introduced to the PA role.

"That position gave me firsthand insight into how important accessible, team-based care is and I often found myself wanting to do more for patients beyond the counter," she recalls. "It opened my eyes to the PA role and once I realized it combined medical decision-making with a strong patient focus and flexibility across specialties, it really clicked for me."

Chigora's journey highlights how varied experiences can lead to the PA path. For Jen Haskett, that path began in a different corner of healthcare.

Haskett just finished her first year of Dalhousie's MPAS

program. Before enrolling, she spent nearly two decades as a clinical dietitian in pediatric gastroenterology at the IWK Health Centre. Her deep interest in understanding all aspects of patient care, and the desire to play a more active role in treatment, made the physician assistant path a natural next step.

"Having worked in healthcare in Nova Scotia for so many years, and living with a chronic illness, I have seen and even experienced first-hand as both a patient and a provider, some of the challenges with our current overburdened system," she says. "I was excited at the prospect of being part of the solution, or at least one piece of that puzzle."

Now completed one year of the program, Haskett is looking ahead to her clerkship year, which will take her to the Annapolis Valley for rotations at Hants Community Hospital, Valley Regional Hospital in Kentville, and a rural family medicine placement in Annapolis Royal. Though the program is still evolving, she feels reassured by how faculty have responded to feedback from current clerkship students to strengthen the learning experience.

That feedback has been essential, as students acknowledge that the transition from classroom to clinic hasn't been without its challenges. As part of a new and growing program, they've encountered logistical hurdles, steep learning curves, and moments of uncertainty.



MPAS students practicing in the skills lab

“It was a steep learning curve not only in terms of medical information, but also in terms of how a PA program should run,” reflects Minocha. “The goal for a lot of students in my class was to try to make effective change in the program so that future classes would have smooth transitions and be able to focus their attention on learning how to be a good PA.”

Despite these growing pains, students report overwhelmingly positive responses from both patients and healthcare teams.

Daniel Reyly has been a practicing physician assistant since 2008, joining the emergency department team at the Dartmouth General Hospital in 2023 after relocating from New York. He has been actively involved with the MPAS program, acting as an advisor on class panels, serving as a preceptor for second-year students in the emergency department, and engaging in Nova Scotia Health’s Interprofessional Practice and Leadership team. He says that though the inaugural MPAS class has faced unique challenges as the trailblazers of the program, they have demonstrated remarkable resilience, professionalism, and capability.

“As a cohort, they are proving themselves to be highly competent future providers, and I believe they will be an excellent addition to the healthcare system. Their contributions will undoubtedly benefit patients, colleagues, and the broader community.”

While the PA role still draws curiosity from some patients, most are supportive once it’s explained and many providers, like Reyly, are eager to help students learn, recognizing the value PAs bring to improving access and continuity of care.

As the inaugural cohort of Dalhousie’s MPAS program finished their program this past December, their journey marks a transformative moment for healthcare in Nova Scotia.

“PAs are a growing and essential part of Canada’s healthcare landscape and the profession is only going to become more important in the years to come” says Heather. “My experience in the program has confirmed that this is not only a rewarding career path but also a vital one.”

Now with their training complete, these new graduates are poised to become vital contributors to a more accessible, team-based healthcare system—bringing compassion, skill, and advocacy to the communities they serve.



MPAS student practicing in the skills lab

## Planning the Moments That Matter: Introducing the DMAA Reunion Toolkit

For many Dalhousie medical alumni, reunions are more than calendar milestones; they are meaningful opportunities to reconnect, reflect, and celebrate the shared experiences that shaped a career in medicine.

In response to growing interest and feedback from alumni across generations, the Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association (DMAA) is expanding its support for reunion planning with the introduction of a new, thoughtfully developed Reunion Planning Toolkit.

### A glimpse into the toolkit

The new toolkit builds on existing supports already available to reunion organizers, from class lists and communications assistance to on-the-ground coordination in Halifax and curated reunion packages. It also reflects a renewed commitment to ensuring that alumni are aware of, and can easily access, these services.

While every reunion is unique, common themes have emerged from alumni feedback: the importance of starting early, communicating clearly, and sharing responsibilities across a small, dedicated team. The toolkit speaks to these themes by offering guidance that helps organizers think ahead, often as much as 12 to 18 months in advance, while remaining adaptable to the needs of each class.

It also touches on the many moving parts that shape a successful reunion. From choosing venues and navigating contracts, to engaging classmates and coordinating meaningful

programming, the toolkit provides a high-level roadmap designed to reduce uncertainty and build confidence.

Importantly, it recognizes that planning a reunion is not just about logistics; it is about people. Thoughtful touches like collecting class updates, recognizing milestones, and creating space for shared memories are what transform an event into a lasting experience.

### Addressing common challenges

Through consultations with alumni, the DMAA has gained a clearer understanding of the barriers that can make reunion planning feel daunting. Outdated contact information, complex financial coordination, and navigating accreditation for continuing medical education are just a few of the challenges organizers have faced.

The toolkit responds to these realities by offering clearer pathways forward and helping alumni feel supported rather than overwhelmed. It also reinforces the DMAA’s role as a connector, whether by facilitating communication, sharing insights from past reunions, or helping organizers tap into existing networks.

### Looking ahead

The introduction of the Reunion Planning Toolkit marks an important step in strengthening alumni engagement and ensuring that reunions remain vibrant, accessible, and meaningful for years to come. It also reflects a broader vision: one where alumni feel empowered to take the lead, knowing they are backed by a responsive and supportive association.

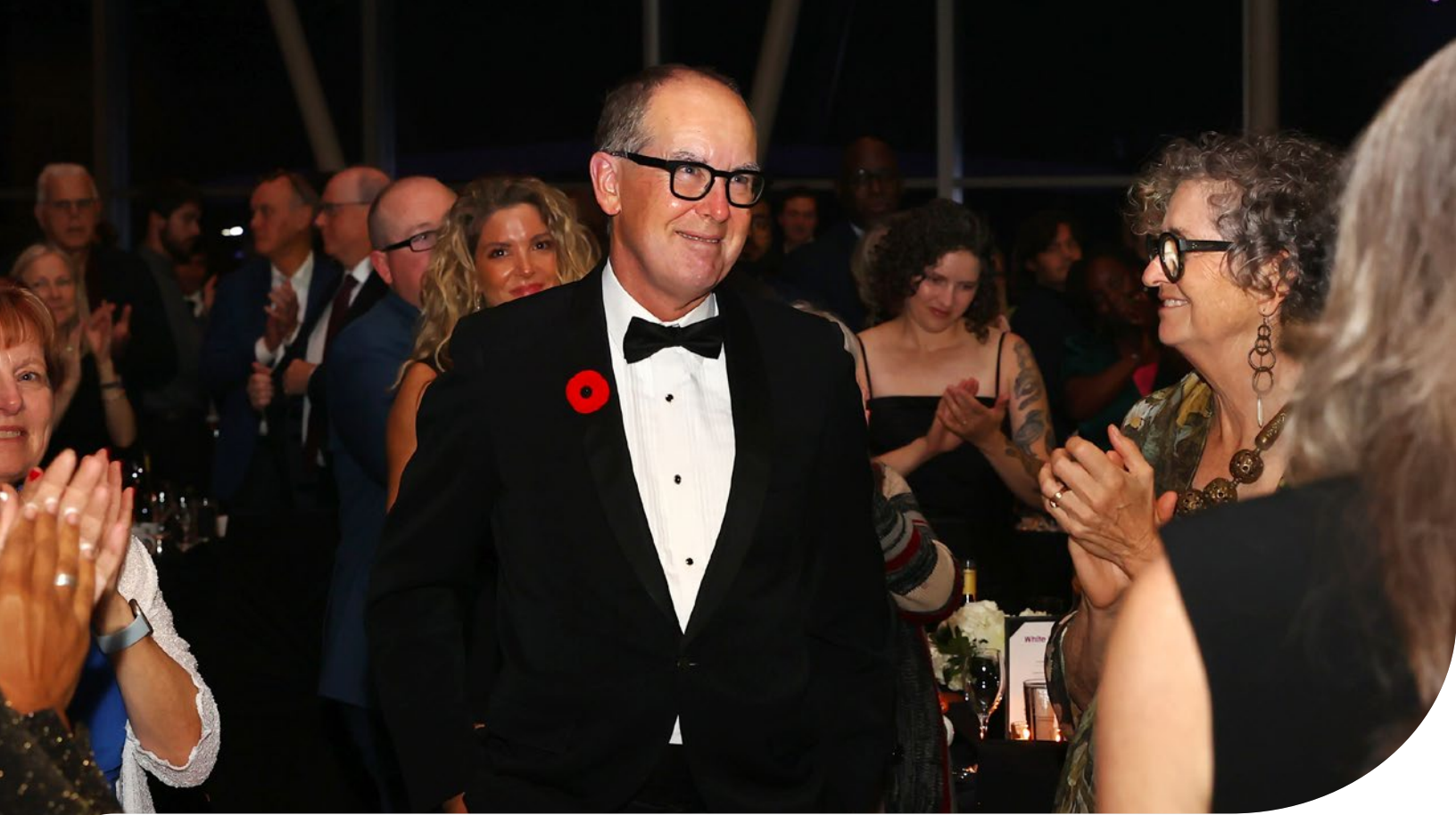
## We’re here to help

If your class is considering a reunion, or if you are already in the early stages of planning, the DMAA encourages you to connect and explore how the toolkit can support your efforts.

**To access the Reunion Planning Toolkit, please reach out to [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca).**

Reunions begin with a simple idea—to reconnect. With the right support, they become something much more: a celebration of community, legacy, and the enduring bonds of Dalhousie Medicine.

The development of the toolkit was guided in large part by the leadership and insight of Dr. Cindy Forbes (MD’85), recently retired Past President of the DMAA. Working closely with alumni and staff, Dr. Forbes helped shape a resource that reflects the real needs and experiences of those who have planned reunions before.



◀ Dr. Anderson receiving a standing ovation at the Dal Med Gala on Nov 1, 2025

## Leading Through a Decade of Change

Dr. David Anderson reflects on leadership, partnerships, and the future of Dalhousie Medicine.

Dr. David Anderson, Dalhousie University’s 13<sup>th</sup> Dean of Medicine, completes his second term June 30, 2026, after more than 11 years in the role.

Each June, following convocation ceremonies, the pace begins to shift in Dalhousie’s Faculty of Medicine.

The crowds have dispersed, the celebrations have settled, and another class of graduates has crossed the stage—marking both an ending and a beginning.

For Dr. David Anderson, this year’s ceremonies carried an added weight.

After more than a decade as dean of medicine, it was his final convocation in the role—a moment that might invite reflection. For Dr. Anderson, however, the focus has never been on looking back.

“I’ve always tried to look forward,” he says. “In medicine especially, there’s always a temptation to ask what could have been done differently. But the more important approach is to say: we are where we are—what can we do next?”

It’s a mindset that has shaped his approach to leadership over the past 11 years—years defined by growth across campuses, closer partnerships with health systems and communities, and a Faculty that continues to evolve.

Now, as he prepares to step away from the role, Dr. Anderson sees this moment as more than closing a chapter. It’s a transition that makes space for new ideas, new leadership, and the work that lies ahead.

### Building on a strong foundation

Dr. Anderson didn’t set out to become dean. But when the moment came, the timing felt right.

He had a mere year under his belt as head of the Department of Medicine when Dr. Tom Marrie announced he was stepping down as Dean of Medicine. While he considered the role, he still had a lot he wanted to accomplish as head. A failed search and a year-and-a-half later, however, the situation had changed.

“I was at a point in my career where I felt I was a credible candidate,” he recalls. It also felt like a full-circle opportunity. I remember fondly my years as a medical student and resident at

Dalhousie, so the chance to return to that environment and to work with students and help shape the next generation, was very appealing.”

With a very high opinion of the Faculty of Medicine and the positive state Dr. Marrie had left things, Dr. Anderson set out to build on that work and continue to strengthen the Faculty as a world-class medical school with strong education and research programs.

And build on it, he did, finding success in many areas over his tenure.

But he’s the first to tell you that he didn’t do it alone.

“It’s very much a team effort,” he says. “You’re only as strong as the people around you and we’ve been able to recruit outstanding leaders, educators, and scientists.”

That spirit of shared leadership can be seen in the way the Faculty of Medicine has grown and adapted over the past decade. One area Dr. Anderson is especially proud of is its increased commitment to social accountability, including the creation of a dedicated portfolio focused on serving and engaging society.

“We can be proud of the progress we’ve made,” he says.

“In particular with our efforts to address long-standing gaps in admissions for Indigenous and Black students.”

The development of targeted support programs has also helped foster student success, and the impact is already visible, with graduates entering the workforce and, in some cases, returning as faculty.

Growth has also extended across the Faculty of Medicine’s distributed campuses, supported by strong and committed leadership at each site. Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick (DMNB) has evolved significantly over the past decade, becoming a cornerstone of the Faculty, in both its reach, and in the strength of the leaders, educators, and teams guiding its continued development.

*“In medicine especially, there’s always a temptation to ask what could have been done differently. But the more important approach is to say: we are where we are—what can we do next?”*

The launch of the Cape Breton Medical Campus in August 2025 marked another important step forward. With its focus on rural health and family medicine, the campus is expected to make a meaningful difference for communities across the province and region.

“Dalhousie has a long history of delivering medical education across the Maritimes, and with this expansion, we’re creating a system that truly reaches across Nova Scotia,” he says. “I’m very optimistic about the future, particularly for primary care, given the investments that have been made.”



Dr. Anderson touring the CORES facility



### Progress through partnership

The growth that Dr. Anderson emphasizes didn't happen in isolation.

Much of the Faculty of Medicine's progress has been rooted in collaboration with health authorities, governments, physicians, and communities.

"Collaboration is essential," Dr. Anderson says. "You need the support of all of these organizations for these things to happen."

He remarks that the Cape Breton Medical Campus, developed in partnership with Cape Breton University, is a perfect example of how government support, collaboration with Nova Scotia Health and the IWK, and engagement from physicians, and communities aligns for success.

"It really is a huge team effort, with leadership across organizations working together to make these things happen. People have been incredibly generous and responsive."

### Rooted in connection

If collaboration defined the work, connection defined how Dr. Anderson chose to lead.

"It's important to be open and available, to understand what people are experiencing, and to be willing to step in when needed," he says. "At the same time, you recognize that there's a strong team around you doing the work on the ground."

That commitment to staying connected took him beyond Halifax and into communities across the Maritimes, where regular visits to distributed teaching sites became a highlight of his tenure. The visits allowed him to meet with students, faculty, and communities to find out what they're proud of, what support they needed, and provide insight into some of the challenges in delivering a world class medical education outside of an urban environment.

Much of his role, he admits, has been creating space, providing encouragement, and setting up a framework that allows others to succeed. He draws on the Faculty of Medicine's strategic plan as an example.

"By emphasizing areas like serving and engaging society and valuing people, those priorities were reflected in departments and programs as well," he says. "When something is clearly valued at an organizational level, it tends to carry through and have a broader impact."

### Lessons in leadership

In 11 years, it is inevitable that at times, you will be tested as a leader. For Dr. Anderson, that came in the form of difficult situations, financial pressures, and the unexpected, which arrived in 2020 with the pandemic. And while it required complete focus, and the setting aside of other priorities, he admits it led to some positive changes that have been carried forward.

"I have never shied away from difficult situations. You work through them and do your best, and often, when you engage with them directly, positive outcomes emerge."

Now, as he prepares to step away from his duties as dean, he is hopeful to have created a culture that the next generation of leaders can build on, while also recognizing new leadership must do what they believe is best for the Faculty of Medicine and the region.

*"I have never shied away from difficult situations. You work through them and do your best, and often, when you engage with them directly, positive outcomes emerge."*

"Leadership transitions are a great opportunity to reset and reimagine the future," he says. "Take time to listen, meet people and hear their ideas, and understand their perspectives. This is an engaged, thoughtful community, and taking the time to hear from people will pay off in the long term."

It's advice shaped by more than a decade of experience, and exactly what he would tell himself if we were just now beginning as dean.

As he moves into the next chapter—one that will bring more by family time, activities he enjoys, and flexibility—his final reflections are grounded in gratitude.

"It's been a privilege to serve in this role, and I've been very fortunate to have the trust and support of the people I've worked with," he reflects. "I'm genuinely grateful for the fulfillment this role has brought, and I wish everyone the very best as they continue their work."

"I have no doubt there are great things ahead for the Faculty, the people, and the community, who will benefit from all the great work that's happened."



1 Dr. Anderson at the Excellence in Leadership Awards in September, 2021

2 Dr. Anderson at the BSc Medical Sciences grad celebration June 2026

3 Dr. Anderson with his wife Michelle Karis at the 2025 Dal Med Gala



◀ A new Division of Public Health and Preventive Medicine has been launched at Dalhousie and Nova Scotia Health.

# A home for public health

## New Dalhousie and Nova Scotia Health division puts people and prevention first

Public health physicians in the Maritimes now have an official place to grow, collaborate and lead—right here at Dalhousie.

The launch of the new Division of Public Health and Preventive Medicine (PHPM), shaped by long-term planning and the hard-earned lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, is set to transform how the region trains, supports and empowers public health leaders. Led by interim division head, Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed (MD’99), the new division aims to bring public health physicians into the Dalhousie environment.

“We haven’t had an academic home for public health physicians in the Maritime provinces, even though many are interested in academic work and teaching,” says Dr. Watson-Creed. “Students from across the country still come here for public health experiences, so we wanted to support that interest by creating the right environment.”

Developed in collaboration with Nova Scotia Health (NS Health), the new division is located within Dalhousie’s

Department of Community Health and Epidemiology and will offer opportunities to enhance public health expertise and capacity in Nova Scotia and the Maritimes.

“The new Division of Public Health and Preventive Medicine is transformational for Dalhousie Medicine and the broader Maritime region,” says Dr. David Anderson, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. “It gives public health physicians a true academic home, which highlights the important work they do to build healthier communities, and deepens our support for learners, faculty and researchers who are passionate about population health.”

### Lessons from the pandemic

In the Maritimes, PHPM specialist physicians may work in a variety of settings. Some are employed as Medical Officers of Health at the regional, provincial or federal level, while others work across clinical, academic and research settings to advance health equity and improve outcomes for diverse communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic thrust public health into the spotlight, making the work of Nova Scotia’s Chief Medical Officer of Health,

Dr. Robert Strang, and his team a daily fixture for residents across the province. As the government responded to rapidly evolving challenges, the need for robust training, succession planning and academic engagement among public health physicians became increasingly clear.

This heightened awareness not only underscored gaps in the system but also sparked new interest among students and practitioners in pursuing clinical and academic roles within public health.

“There’s been a longstanding lack of awareness of public health and preventive medicine as a recognized specialty,” says Dr. Strang. “Having this division brings a focus on prevention to leadership tables and creates opportunities to rebalance investments in care and prevention. Prevention is multi-layered and complex, and working in this space requires a specialized skill set.”

### A new residency in public health and preventive medicine

A cornerstone of the new division will be the launch of a dedicated residency program. Though a recognized Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada specialty, until now, many public health physicians in the region have held academic appointments in family medicine, because of lack of opportunity in public health. The new division will bring these practitioners together, providing a robust academic environment and diverse training experiences for learners across Atlantic Canada. Working closely with the Royal College to align with new national competencies, the division would anticipate its first residency intake by 2028.

“It’s so exciting to think about hosting that content here,” says Dr. Watson-Creed. “Having residents energizes the public health system, so we’re really looking forward to that opportunity.”

By embedding resident trainees in the region’s public health infrastructure, Dalhousie aims to foster a new generation of leaders equipped to advance health equity, drive research and respond to emerging public health needs.

### Community-driven research

A central mandate of Dalhousie’s new division is to advance research and academic growth, not just for public health physicians, but for learners at every stage of training. By integrating public health expertise within the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, the division creates new pathways for collaboration, innovation and hands-on learning.

“Having an academic home like this brings agencies like CIHR directly into focus for those practitioners,” says Dr. Watson-Creed. “The folks who join the division will be able to take advantage

of that, which means that the ideas they’ve been holding on to, or the ideas fed to them by community around research that’s needed now, actually have some chance of growing and having life breathed into them.”

The division will coordinate research efforts with the Faculty of Medicine and health authorities, focusing on areas relevant to Nova Scotia’s population health needs. This includes supporting community-driven research, advancing health equity and addressing the structural determinants of health. By connecting public health physicians with academic resources and funding opportunities, the division aims to increase research activity and impact across the region.

*“Having this division brings a focus on prevention to leadership tables and creates opportunities to rebalance investments in care and prevention.”*

— DR. GAYNOR WATSON-CREED

### Real-world public health experience

The division will raise the profile of public health as a specialty, attracting learners for various projects—graduate studies, undergraduate electives and research projects, and more. Prospective faculty are eager to contribute to teaching at all levels, ensuring that learners have access to engaged educators and real-world public health experiences.

“Dalhousie is an amazing place to learn and grow,” says Dr. Watson-Creed. “Learners will have new opportunities to engage with public and population health, and faculty will be able to develop the academic side of their work. The excitement around this is real.”

By building a robust academic environment and supporting interdisciplinary research, Dalhousie’s new division is poised to shape the future of public health in the Maritimes—empowering the next generation of leaders to advance health equity, drive innovation and respond to emerging challenges.

# All Rhodes lead to home

## Rhodes scholar Sierra Sparks returns home to study medicine

Sierra Sparks was inspired by strong female role models from a young age.

The medical student from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, entered a field where women were few and stereotypes were plenty when she chose engineering for her undergraduate studies at Dalhousie.

Despite being told the path would be “too hard” and even encouraged to consider nursing instead, Sierra persisted—and excelled. She graduated in 2021 with an engineering degree and a passion for equity and inclusion.

Knowing she wanted to pursue graduate training in biomedical engineering, Sierra applied to one of the most prestigious universities in the world through the **Rhodes Scholarship** at The University of Oxford, in the U.K. Her acceptance made her **Dalhousie's 92nd Rhodes Scholar**, a milestone that opened doors to groundbreaking research and global connections.

It was in Oxford's historic halls that Sierra discovered her true passion was medicine. She applied and was accepted to Dalhousie Medicine through the **Black Learners Admissions Pathway (BLAP)**. Now, after completing her first year, she's embracing every opportunity to learn while staying deeply connected to the community that shaped her.

### Early inspiration

Sierra's interest in engineering began in junior high, thanks to her cousin, who was completing an engineering degree at Dalhousie.

“It was a pretty important, formative time for me,” she recalls. “I was able to see what she was learning, and I remember being really inspired by her. She was captain of the Dal hockey team, excelling in school, and it never seemed like something I couldn't do too.”

Her love for math and science reinforced her interest, and the problem-solving nature of engineering appealed to her curiosity.

“It just seemed like what I was meant to do,” she says. Despite guidance counselors suggesting nursing instead, Sierra stayed focused on her course. “If I didn't have a role model, I'm not sure I would have chosen this path,” she admits.

As a woman in a program and discipline in which women have long been underrepresented, she found her first year of engineering challenging as she confronted stereotypes and assumptions about gender in the field.

“Having people assume I needed extra help motivated me more,” she recalls. “That's why I wanted to get involved with EDI [Equity, diversity, and inclusion] efforts in engineering and STEM more broadly.”

In her second year of engineering, Sierra became involved with the women in engineering community and the Dalhousie Undergraduate Engineering Society. Later, she became Vice President of External Relations for the society, working with engineering societies across Canada and advocating for students. Through this work, she visited high schools and the African Nova Scotian communities to introduce students to engineering early. She attended conferences like the Canadian Conference on Diversity in Engineering where she quickly realized how important representation is.

“People talked about how it strengthens the discipline by having different perspectives, which I understood, but didn't really grasp how much until I stepped out of my comfort zone and connected with students nationwide.”

As Sierra's undergraduate journey drew to a close, she was ready to take on new challenges and soon, an unexpected opportunity arrived.

She finished her coursework in December 2020 and was stunned to learn she was a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship. Support poured in from Dalhousie and her community, and after her acceptance call, she celebrated with family, unprepared for the media spotlight that followed.

“The media attention was overwhelming, especially with discussions about diversity in the Rhodes Scholar class,” she recalls. “Some outlets in the United States criticized the focus on diversity, but I knew we earned our achievements.”

### A new passion for medicine

At Oxford, Sierra immersed herself in biomedical engineering research, focusing on whether a simple eye test could spot early signs of brain disease. By measuring how quickly pupils react to light, she hoped to find an easier, non-invasive way to assess brain vascular health, potentially replacing costly scans with a quick checkup tool.

Although Sierra initially planned to work on ultrasound imaging and machine learning, conversations with potential supervisors led her to MRI research. It was her PhD supervisor who introduced her



Sierra Sparks, Dalhousie's 92nd Rhodes Scholar, graduated from Oxford University in 2021 and is now about to enter her second year of medical school at Dalhousie. (Photo: Nnamdi Chiekwe)

to the pupillary light response project, blending both engineering and medical perspectives and ultimately shaping the direction of her graduate work.

“It was certainly a steep learning curve, but I enjoyed it,” she says. “I attended medical conferences through this work that really introduced me to that world and contributed to my interest in medicine.”

The experience also allowed her to discover that the things she loved most about engineering, like problem-solving and advocacy, were just as vital in medicine.

This realization shifted her trajectory, and she began studying for the MCAT, with a dream to return to Nova Scotia and pursue medicine at Dalhousie after her PhD.

She applied to Dalhousie Medicine through the BLAP, a program designed to increase representation and support for Black students in medicine. For her, the pathway wasn't about making entrance to the program easier, but about building community.

“The biggest benefit is having that network of support,” she explains. “Having that community has been invaluable.”

After completing her first year, Sierra is now active in the Black Medical Student Association and participates in initiatives like the Pulse program, which connects students with surgical mentors, offering workshops and hands-on experiences. She continues to be passionate about advocacy, equity, and inclusion.

“Growing up in Dartmouth with strong ties to Cherrybrook, I saw firsthand how public health messaging during the pandemic affected African Nova Scotians,” she says. “I want to practice medicine in a culturally appropriate way, understanding the unique perspectives of those communities.”

### The importance of representation

Sierra's journey from Dal Engineering to Oxford University in England, and back to Dalhousie Medicine highlights that persistence makes dreams possible, something she offers as advice to others facing limited representation.

“Use challenges as inspiration to prove people wrong,” she says. “Diversity isn't just the right thing—it's a strength. Your unique background and skills are valuable contributions, especially in fields like medicine and engineering where problem solving benefits from different perspectives.”

As Sierra looks ahead, she envisions a future where engineering and medicine intersect—whether through health technology, teaching, or advocacy. Her goal is clear: to make science accessible, empower communities, and inspire others to see diversity not as a barrier but as a powerful advantage.

## Class Notes

Have a professional accomplishment you'd like to share with the alumni community? Please contact [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca).

### 1960s

**Dr. Meng H. Tan (MD' 69 & BSc'65)** was recognized with Dalhousie's prestigious *Aurum Award* on May 22, 2026, honouring his exceptional global contributions to diabetes care, including improving access to insulin, advancing clinical guidelines and education, and supporting international public health initiatives with the World Health Organization.

### 1970s

**Dr. William (Bill) Stanish (MD' 70)** and fellow alumnus **Ian Oulton (BA' 66)** were honoured at the official opening of Dalhousie University's new **Oulton-Stanish Centre** on March 12, 2026. The 60,000-square-foot wellness and recreation hub, named in their honour as the Oulton-Stanish Centre which recognizes their leadership, philanthropy, and longstanding commitment to Dalhousie athletics and community wellness.

### 1990s

**Dr. Kenneth Rockwood (PGM '91)** received the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's *James H. Graham Award of Merit* on May 4, 2026, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to health care and leadership in advancing the well-being of older adults.

**Dr. Stephanie Langley (MD'95, PGM'09, MSc'92)** was appointed *Senior Associate Dean* of the Cape Breton Medical Campus, on January 5, 2026, providing academic and operational leadership for undergraduate medical education in collaboration with faculty, health system partners, and community stakeholders.

**Dr. Nicole Boutilier (MD'95)** was honoured with the *Chris Carruthers Excellence in Medical Leadership Award* by the Canadian Society of Physician Leaders in May 2026. The award recognizes physicians who have demonstrated exceptional leadership and made significant contributions to mentoring and developing future medical leaders.

**Dr. Annette Bell (MD'97)** has been appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, Division of Hospital Medicine, at **Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School** in New Jersey, part of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences at Rutgers University, beginning June 2026.

**Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed (MD'99)** was appointed Interim Head of the newly established **Division of Public Health and Preventive Medicine** within the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology at Dalhousie University and Nova Scotia Health, on January 1, 2026. The Division will advance public health training, research, and practice across the region, with a focus on health equity, population health, and strengthening public health capacity in Atlantic Canada.

### 2000s

**Dr. Keith Wilson (PGM '04)** was appointed as Assistant Dean, Student and Resident Affairs at Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick (DMNB). Effective July 1, 2026. Dr. Wilson will serve a five-year term in this leadership role, supporting the success and well-being of medical students and residents across the New Brunswick campus.

**Dr. Lisa Barrett (PGM'09)** was recognized as one of Dalhousie University's *Notable Alumni* in March 2026, honouring her work as a clinician-scientist and infectious diseases specialist whose leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic advanced public health approaches, including expanded testing and community-based care.

### 2010s

**Dr. Brent Young (MD '19)** was announced as the recipient of the *Dr. Thomas Dignan Indigenous Health Award* on May 4, 2026, as part of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada 2026 national awards program. Dr. Young is being recognized for his leadership in advancing Indigenous-led models of care, culturally safe clinical services, and pathways for Indigenous medical students. Through his work in clinical care, advocacy, and systems leadership, he continues to champion Indigenous self-determination and improved health outcomes across Canada.

## In Memoriam

The DMAA acknowledges the passing of our alumni and faculty with sincere sympathy and gratitude for their contributions to medicine. If you know of anyone to note in this section, please contact [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca).

**DR. WINSTON DYKEMAN (MD'71)**  
Passed away March 7, 2025

**DR. GEORGE HALEY (MD'73)**  
Passed away July 24, 2025

**DR. VIRGINIA FINDLATER (MD '74)**  
Passed away November 16, 2025

**DR. SUSAN DEMPSEY-MCKIM (MD '77)**  
Passed away November 17, 2025

**DR. LAWRENCE COSTELLO (MD'76)**  
Passed away November 27, 2025

**BARBARA LOUISE BLAUVELT**  
Passed away December 1, 2025

**DR. JOHN MARTIN (MD'65)**  
Passed away December 4, 2025

**DR. EDWIN ROSENBERG (MD'65)**  
Passed away December 6, 2025

**DR. ROBERT BLAIR (MD'65)**  
Passed away December 9, 2025

**DR. GREGG MACLEAN (MD'84, PGM'85)**  
Passed away December 31, 2025

**DR. MERVIN (MERV) SHAW (MD'65)**  
Passed away February 24, 2026

**DR. DONALD MCDONAH (MD'81)**  
Passed away March 16, 2026

**DR. ANDREA JONES (MD'96)**  
Passed away March 10, 2026

**DR. ANNIE LAW (PGM'72)**  
Passed away March 25, 2026

**DR. IAN VERRY-N-STUART (MD'76, PGM'78)**  
Passed away March 28, 2026

**DR. PAUL PRICE (MD'80 & PGM'89)**  
Passed away March 15, 2026

**DR. PAUL ALAN MEARS (PGM'08)**  
Passed away May 20, 2026

**DR. WAYNE GORMAN (MD'73)**  
Passed away June 8, 2026

*Barbara Louise Blauvelt was an integral and deeply respected member of the Dalhousie University Faculty of Medicine for more than four decades. While not a physician, she played a foundational role in the life and continuity of the medical school, serving as secretary to Dean Dr. Harry G. Grant beginning in 1948 and supporting six successive Deans over her 45-year career. As assistant to the Deans and Executive Secretary of the Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association, she helped shape and sustain the administrative and alumni infrastructure of the Faculty, becoming a trusted institutional presence and a living link across generations of leadership.*



## A New Chapter for the DMAA Alumni Recognition Awards

### SAVE THE DATE:

DMAA Alumni Recognition Awards

Saturday November 7, 2026

### Celebrating excellence, community, and impact

The Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association (DMAA) is excited to share an evolution in how we celebrate our alumni. This year, we are reimagining the DMAA Alumni Recognition Awards, expanding the event to create an even more inclusive and meaningful opportunity for our entire alumni community to come together.

In place of the Dal Med Gala this year, we will be hosting an enhanced DMAA Awards celebration, which will be open to all alumni. This event will shine a spotlight on the remarkable achievements of our award recipients while also recognizing MD classes that have reached significant milestones in their class fundraising efforts.

### Honouring a beloved tradition

We know the Dal Med Gala holds a special place for many in our community. Looking ahead, the Gala will return every four years as a signature, large-scale celebration. In the years between, the DMAA Awards will take centre stage and grow in scope to include expanded programming such as Class Cup presentations and broader alumni participation.

This refreshed approach allows us to celebrate excellence every year, while building anticipation for a truly grand Gala experience when it returns.

### What's new this year

We are especially proud to introduce two new awards that reflect the strength and impact of research across our Faculty of Medicine community.

#### Excellence in Research Training Award

This award recognizes outstanding research achievements by a current graduate student or postdoctoral fellow within the Faculty of Medicine. The Excellence in Research Training Award recipient will have demonstrated research excellence through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, or other scholarly outputs, as well as success in obtaining competitive studentship or fellowship funding. The recipient will have demonstrated meaningful contributions to outreach, mentorship, or activities that strengthen the university or local communities.

#### Distinguished Research Career Award

This award honours a Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine alumnus who has built an exceptional career as a research faculty member at an academic hospital, university, or research organization. The recipient has sustained meaningful impact on health research contributions to teaching and mentorship and demonstrated a distinguished career advancing knowledge and innovation in medicine.

We look forward to welcoming you to this exciting new chapter of the DMAA Awards, an opportunity to come together, celebrate excellence, and honour the collective impact of our alumni community.

### Class Funds & Class Cups

## Support Our Medical Learners and Celebrate Your Class

Each fall, we celebrate medical class fund efforts through our Class Cups Recognition Program, which honours classes that reach key fundraising milestones: \$100K, \$200K, \$300K, \$400K, and \$500K.

As part of this year's expanded DMAA Awards, Class Cup recognitions will be featured at the ceremony, offering even more opportunity to celebrate your class's collective impact.

Interested in starting a class fund or learning where your class stands on its next milestone? Contact [emily.brown5@dal.ca](mailto:emily.brown5@dal.ca) to learn more and explore ways your class can achieve its goals.

### Nominate an Outstanding Alum

## Help Us Celebrate Excellence

Do you know an alumnus making an extraordinary impact in medicine, research, or their community?

We invite you to submit a nomination for a DMAA Alumni Recognition Award. Your nomination helps us recognize and celebrate the incredible accomplishments within our alumni network. To nominate someone, please complete a nomination form and submit it to: [medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca)

Dr. Paul Atkinson, PhD candidate Tori Nelson, Dr. Duncan Webster and Dr. Keith Brunt ▶

## Breakthrough Breakfast Highlights: Showcasing Research Excellence at DMNB

On the morning of December 2, 2025, Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick (DMNB) welcomed alumni, faculty, partners, and community members to Saint John for its latest Breakthrough Breakfast. An event that continues to build momentum as a space for connection, discovery, and shared pride in regional research.

### Bringing research to the breakfast table

Held for the first time on the DMNB campus, the gathering offered a closer look at the depth and diversity of medical research taking place in New Brunswick. The format was simple but effective: good conversation over breakfast, followed by a series of engaging presentations from researchers whose work is directly shaping patient care and health outcomes, both locally and beyond.

The program featured four speakers representing different stages of the research journey. Dr. Paul Atkinson opened with

reflections on compassion in medicine, exploring how empathy and clinical care intersect in meaningful, measurable ways. His talk set the tone for the morning, grounded in both science and the human experience.

Dr. Duncan Webster (MD' 01 & PGM' 07) followed with insights drawn from his work in infectious diseases, including efforts to improve diagnostics and care for complex conditions such as chronic viral infections and tuberculosis. His research highlighted the importance of integrating clinical practice with innovation to better serve vulnerable populations.

PhD candidate Tori Nelson (MSC' 23) brought a trainee perspective to the stage, sharing her work on heart failure and the mechanisms that can slow or prevent disease progression. Her presentation underscored the vital role that emerging researchers play in advancing new ideas and approaches within the health system.

Closing the speaker lineup, Dr. Keith Brunt explored the science of healthy aging, offering a forward-looking perspective on how research can support longer, healthier lives. His work connects foundational science with practical applications, bridging the gap between discovery and patient experience.

### Building momentum in New Brunswick

Together, the presentations painted a picture of a research community that is both collaborative and deeply connected to the needs of the region. From rural health challenges to chronic disease management, the work being done at DMNB reflects a strong commitment to improving care where it matters most.

The morning also served as a reminder that this kind of progress does not happen in isolation. It is built through partnerships across institutions, across disciplines, and with the support of individuals and organizations who believe in the value of investing in health research. That collective effort continues to strengthen New Brunswick's role within the broader medical research landscape.

As the Breakthrough Breakfast series continues to grow, so too does its impact, creating opportunities for Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine and community members to stay connected to the work happening at Dalhousie and to see firsthand how research is making a difference.



Dr. Keith Brunt presenting at the DMNB Breakthrough Breakfast in Saint John

A sincere thank you to the sponsors who made this event possible:



### Stay Connected

Interested in attending a future **Breakthrough Breakfast** or learning more about the impactful research happening at Dalhousie Medicine? We'd love to hear from you.

Reach out to [cathrine.yuill@dal.ca](mailto:cathrine.yuill@dal.ca) on the Advancement team at to stay informed about upcoming events and opportunities to get involved.

Also keep an eye to learn about our most recent Breakthrough Breakfast, *From Discovery to Better Health Outcomes: The Promise of Genetics and Genomic*, that took place on Tuesday, June 9, 2026, at Pier 21 in Halifax.

## Upcoming Reunions

### MD 1981 – 45th Anniversary

July 31–August 2 | Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Contact: Tony Kelly – tkellymd@aol.com

### MD 1986 – 40th Anniversary

August 28–30 | Fox Harb’r, Nova Scotia  
Contact: David Wood – wood1600@mac.com

### MD 1976 – 50th Anniversary

September 11–13 | Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Contact: David Amirault – amiraultjd@gmail.com

### MD 1972 – 54th Anniversary

September 2026 | Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Contact: Ken Murray – murraykenlin@gmail.com

### MD 1969 – 57th Anniversary

September 2026 | Moncton, New Brunswick  
Contact: Douglas Baird – dgbpab@gmail.com

### MD 1966 – 60th Anniversary

September 30–October 2 | Wolfville, Nova Scotia  
Contacts: Barry Yoell – b.e.yoell60@gmail.com  
& Garth Christie gbc.christie@gmail.com

### MD 2006 – 20th Anniversary

October 2–4 | Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Contacts: Stacy Ridi – stacy.ridi@kingstonhsc.ca  
& Alam Nadia – nalam123@gmail.com

Stay connected. Stay involved.  
**Shape the future.**

**The Dalhousie Medical Alumni Association  
is always looking to connect with alumni  
who are interested in getting more involved.**

We welcome applications from Dalhousie medical alumni, including MD, postgraduate, MSc, and PhD graduates, who are passionate about supporting alumni engagement, celebrating achievements, and helping strengthen connections across our medical community. While Board vacancies may not always be available, we maintain a list of interested alumni and regularly reach out as opportunities arise.

**We’d love to  
have you join us!**

To learn more or express your  
interest, contact us at  
[medical.alumni@dal.ca](mailto:medical.alumni@dal.ca).

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