

JOHN CAIRNS

Those four fabulous years of Medical School. Our graduation was on May 31 and the next day, Wendy and I were married. After a short honeymoon on Vancouver Island, we boarded the train for Montreal and 6 days later my rotating internship at the Royal Victoria began. We lived in the McGill ghetto. I realized that surgery was not for me during my early rotations in CVT and general surgery; medicine offered the stimulation I was seeking and by the autumn I was leaning strongly toward Cardiology. I did 3 years of cardiology and a further year of research training on an MRC fellowship. Wendy worked as a personnel officer for Royal Trust until our first daughter was born in 1972, and our second daughter in 1973.

I was recruited to McMaster, still very new and exciting in 1975 and Ontario was wealthy and progressive -an ideal setting to start a career in academic medicine. I ran the ICU at McMaster Medical Centre (MUMC), was busy in the cath lab and continued my research on infarct size measurement and modification both in the dog lab and the ICU/CCU. I fell under the wing of some leaders in thrombosis and clinical trials and eventually led a trial of aspirin in unstable angina, which showed dramatic benefit and was published in the NEJM. Our third daughter was born in 1978 and in 1982 we moved from Dundas to downtown Hamilton into a big old Victorian house.

In 1984 we lived in Oxford on a 1-year sabbatical, working with Peter Sleight (cardiology) and Richard Peto (large clinical trials). Our family had an idyllic year of Oxford life, European travel and more time together than ever before or since. Back at McMaster I became Deputy Chair of the Dept of Medicine in 1986 and Chair in 1988. Wendy took a year of library techniques at Sheridan College and then became an information technologist at Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety in Hamilton. My research career thrived and with outstanding colleagues, I conducted

several clinical trials in acute coronary syndromes, particularly focusing on antithrombotic and antiarrhythmic therapies and later atrial fibrillation.

In 1996 I became Dean of Medicine at UBC. The kids were all off to university so the move was atraumatic for them. It was tough for Wendy and me to leave Hamilton - a great city to bring up kids, and home to the best friends of our lives. But the prospect of leadership of our medical school was irresistible. The challenges were many but over the next few years we were able to recruit many new department heads, the Vancouver hospitals developed a strong vision for academic medicine, we were supported by the Ministry of Health (not by the overall government), we had much success with federal initiatives in health research, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research was a godsend to our research growth. We were able to convince the Liberal opposition to make one of their election platform planks in 2001 to support one medical school but to double its size with UBC programs in Prince George, Victoria and Kelowna. We never looked back from the time of the election in spring 2001 and by the time I finished up in autumn 2003 we were deep into the planning for the first cohort of the expanded, province-wide program beginning in August 2004.

I took a sabbatical beginning in October 2003. It began with Wendy and me having our first extended holiday for many years; we spent 6 weeks in Italy. For the last few weeks of the year we toured several of the medical schools in Australia and New Zealand and then in 2004 I worked for the CIHR for about 18 months, as the Project Officer for their Clinical Research Initiative. I co-directed one of the clinical research infrastructure programs funded from 2008-13.

In 2005, I joined the Cardiology Division in the new Diamond Health Care Centre. I was back home among colleagues involved in my true love, clinical cardiology. I took over the mentoring program for

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early career faculty in Medicine and set up a program in Cardiology. I got involved in the redevelopment of the MD Undergraduate curriculum and co-led the first half of first year for 3 years. I became the President of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences and re-engaged in large clinical trial-based research. I received an Order of BC in 2015, and planned to wind up my academic career in June 2018. Two of our daughters live in BC and the third in Ontario; we have 5 (soon to be 6) grandchildren. Wendy and I were sharing the happiest of lives. Then tragedy struck. On October 30, 2017, Wendy had an embolic stroke, a left hemiparesis and a right hemicraniectomy to relieve increased intracranial pressure. She had a long ICU stay (Lions Gate Hospital), was in hospital for 5 long months. After 2 months in Lynn Valley Care Centre a complication of anticoagulant therapy required transfer back to LGH where she died a few days later. To the end she was motivated, stoic and brave. I hope with time I will learn to bear grief with composure and to live up to the example of bravery Wendy set during her long months of pain and disability.

Medicine has been transformed since we started in 1964. Incredible advances in molecular biology/ pharmacology, genomics, bio-engineering, immunology, minimally invasive surgery, imaging and clinical research methodology have given us the understanding and tools to all but conquer many of the scourges we confronted in the 60's and 70's. Increasingly our focus must shift to the still intractable problems of brain and behavioral dysfunction, senescence, economic and social ills, maldistribution of resources, scarcity and environmental degradation. The challenges have never been greater, the thrill of new knowledge beckons, the opportunity to build a career in the service of others still characterizes our profession. There is no other career I could have imagined for myself, and I would encourage the choice of medicine for any bright young person wishing to make an impact and willing to work hard.