

Family Medicine Updates



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SECRETS OF MY RESEARCH SUCCESS: ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

The NAPCRG conference recently held in Montreal, Canada featured 2 workshops offering advice to researchers, both titled “*Secrets of My Research Success.*” Presenters offering their sage advice included Valerie Gilchrist, MD; Larry Green, MD; Michael Klein, MD, CCFP; Ann Macaulay, CM, MD, FCFP; Moira Stewart, PhD; and Kurt Stange, MD, PhD. Looking back over the past 15 years of their successful research careers, all presenters were asked to comment on the most valuable lessons learned. The themes that cut across all presentations included the presenters’ belief in the importance of collaboration with community, other researchers, and policy makers; and their lifelong commitment to learning.

Dr Macaulay spoke of her belief in listening to the community and bringing everyone to the table as she talked about her long-standing research on diabetes with the Mohawk people of Kanawake, Quebec. Out of those relationships rose her understanding and commitment to participatory research and building knowledge and understanding together with the community. Dr Stange described his commitment to medical practice and the blending of his research interests with practice, in his words, “study how we take care of the folks.” Dr Green remarked that he has witnessed an amazing growth of human capital in family medicine research, noting that the role of practice-based research has remained paramount.

Another key to the researchers’ success has been the support they have received from others and the importance they place on mentoring. Dr Stange described the remarkable senior mentorship that he received at Case Western Reserve through Steve Zyzanski and Jack Medalie—2 successful researchers. Dr Stewart spoke of what she called her synchronicity and luck in entering her doctoral program at a time when Ian McWhinney had just taken over the department of family medicine at the University of Western Ontario and her good fortune to be supervised by him. She spoke of her lifelong commitment

to being a student and the wonderful support that she’s received from NAPCRG. She left us with sound advice, including a quote from Ian McWhinney, “If it doesn’t get written down, it didn’t exist.” Dr Gilchrist attributed much of her success to “choosing the right friends.” Given her background in residency education, her career was supported by affiliating herself with successful research colleagues including, she noted humorously, marrying a fellow scientist.

During the question and answer period, the issue of balance was raised and each of the presenters offered advice on balancing his or her personal life with a demanding career in clinical research. They agreed they could not have done it without their families’ support. Dr Macaulay described how she managed competing priorities by always putting family first and maintaining regular physical activity. She described how the harder she had to work, the more she took on physical activity to sustain her. Dr Stewart summarized her approach to maintaining balance as, “you don’t have to be a star; the right opportunities will come along.” She also reflected on the importance of just saying “no” when faced with too many opportunities. She currently estimates that she has to say “no” 80% of the time. Dr Stange described his life as living a bit below his means so if things don’t work out, he can still feed the children. Dr Klein spoke about the perils of taking on too many administrative duties. To maintain a good attitude, Dr Stange stressed the importance of working with people you like.

In summary, the researchers all recognize the remarkable abundance of good questions that need to be answered, “There are lots of ideas, more than anyone can do.” Dr Green noted the importance of sharing in academia—and that sharing should be a basic skill for measuring collaborators and partnerships. Dr Klein praised the importance of NAPCRG for his career and success. The approachability and welcoming nature of NAPCRG’s annual meetings and the organization have been important catalysts for him. Finally, the researchers concluded by affirming that research is a journey, and not a destination; the research question picks you, not the other way around.

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