

Dr. Peter Newbery – A Leading Pioneer of Rural Medicine

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Dr. Peter James Newbery's enthusiasm to serve is evident in his achievements. He began as a social worker, and after obtaining his Masters and Doctorate of Divinity degrees from the Vancouver School of Theology, became a Minister in the United Church of Canada in 1966. In 1976, he graduated from McMaster University in Medicine and completed a fellowship with the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC). In 1978, he began his practice as a family physician in Hazelton, British Columbia (BC).

In 1987, Dr. Newbery became the United Church Health Services director, a position he held for over 20 years. He served the church continuously aside from three years during which he served as the Postgraduate Programs Director for the University of British Columbia's Department of Family Practice. He took this appointment in 2001. As the United Church Health Services director, he served as the administrator for medical, nursing, and other support services for the six hospitals and eight medical clinics operated by the United Church of Canada, which include hospitals in Hazelton, Bella Coola, and Bella Bella, BC.

For over two decades, Dr. Newbery has been focused on training personnel for rural communities on both a provincial and national scale. He was a founding member of an international group of rural physicians that develop training programs in rural family medicine worldwide. The group's recommendations for rural training have helped form the training program of both Canadian and international medical schools. Under Dr. Newbery's leadership, this group created a support system for practicing and returning rural physicians and for training new rural doctors.

As UBC's Postgraduate Program Director of Family Practice from 2001 to 2005, Dr. Newbery focused on meeting the medical needs of communities from the inner city to the remote communities of the coastal and northern BC. As the RIII Enhanced Skills Program Director, he also developed an enhanced rural skills residency program in Emergency Medicine, Anaesthesia, Elder Care, Palliative Care, Inner City Medicine, Mental Health, Aboriginal Health, Research, Medical Education, Women's Health, Advanced Obstetrics, and International Health. He also played a significant role in developing the Northern Medical Program at the University of Northern British Columbia and the first Family Practice Residency Program in Aboriginal Health. He continues to be a Clinical Professor of Medicine at UBC, teaching medical


students and family physicians alike.

Dr. Newbery remains active in the CFPC and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC). He served on the board of the BC College of Family Physicians from 1988 to 1993, and was elected President in 1992. From 1995 to 2001, he was part of the executive of the CFPC and served as the national president in 1999 and 2000. He is also the chair of the research and education foundation of the CFPC. Dr. Newbery has been a member of numerous provincial and national rural health task forces, including the Northwest Health Services Review, the Federal Minister of Health's Advisory Council on Rural Health, and the Northern health task force, from which came the provincial locum service and Health Match BC. He recently helped author a book on the history of the United Church Health Services in Canada. He has given presentations on medical ethics, rural recruitment, multiculturalism, medicine and ministry and continues to preach frequently in churches throughout Canada. He has also spoken at numerous national and international conferences about rural medicine and life-long learning for family practice physicians.

Dr. Newbery's work and passion for rural medicine has taken him to many remote places in BC. His private and commercial pilot's license has proven useful as he has flown over 1200 hours, often flying newly recruited medical personnel to rural hospitals.

Dr. Newbery has received numerous honours and awards, including honorary member of the CPSBC (1997), the UBC Faculty of Medicine Golden Jubilee Medal (2000), the Vancouver School of Theology Doctor of Divinity (2001), membership in the Order of Canada (2003), the Golden Jubilee Medal presented by Queen Elizabeth II (2003), membership in the Order of British Columbia (2004), and the BCMA Cam Coady Medal of Excellence (2008).

While exemplifying integrity, compassion, and leadership, Dr. Newbery's career has been about service to others. He is active in many facets of medicine from rural practice, administration, rural recruitment, teaching, leadership in the UBC Department of Family Practice, and in the CFPC. His passion and work in rural health has inspired health care workers in BC, as well as across Canada, and has brought increased notoriety and status to rural medicine.

Dr. Newbery emphasizes that his accomplishments would not be possible without his colleagues and the love and support of his family. Dr. Newbery is married to Lynn, who is a retired teacher, administrator, and former Vice Principal of Hazelton High School. Together they have two children: Sarah Lynn, a physician in Ontario, and Mark, a teacher in Hazelton. They also have four grandchildren. 

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