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COMMENTARY

Tribute to Dr. Roy Shephard: Influence on My Career Path

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When looking back on one's life, it is interesting to realize how another individual can alter a career path. I met Roy at the very first symposium put on by Dr. Terry Kavanagh at the Toronto Rehabilitation Centre with regard to their cardiac rehabilitation programme. At that time, I had come to Toronto from Northern Ontario where I had been in family practice for the previous five years. I was doing an internal medicine residency at the Wellesley Hospital prior to starting in the ophthalmology programme at the University of Toronto.

Having been an athlete all my life and being interested in physical activity I was immediately intrigued and soon ended up doing a masters degree in exercise science with Roy. My thesis was on the effects of exercise training in patients with COPD, and the research was carried out at The Toronto Rehabilitation Centre and Sunnybrook Hospital. Roy wanted me to answer so many questions that I eventually had to tell him that the patients were not able to give me any additional time for testing.

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This was some of the earliest research on the effects of exercise training on COPD, and we were able to demonstrate that exercise training was indeed beneficial, appearing not only to improve performance of daily activities, but also to slow the progression of the disease.

While working with Roy, I was persuaded to take a bag full of glass syringes into the O'Keefe Centre as the theatre was then called, to collect air samples in the lounge and bar areas during the intervals because Roy was interested in the effects of second-hand smoking on air quality. This obviously was before the smoking bans that are now commonplace. Fortunately, no one either noticed what I was doing or had me arrested for suspicious behaviour. I doubt very much if it would be safe to do this in the present climate, assuming that you could get the syringes through the door.

My collaboration with Roy led me to work full time with Terry Kavanagh at The Toronto Rehabilitation Centre, and as a result, to have the opportunity to set up and run the Human Performance Laboratory there, as well as being involved with many research projects, including rehabilitating heart transplant patients at Harefield in England.

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Roy's interests are very wide and when I had an opportunity to work with a lady who ran across Canada from St Johns Newfoundland to Victoria British Columbia, he came on board. She ran eight hours a day for one hundred and twelve straight days while we assessed the effects of this epic journey not only on her fitness, body composition, food intake and mood, but also on her immune function and later presented the findings to the Third IOC World Congress on Sports Sciences prior to the Atlanta games and later at ACSM

Roy is also a prolific writer and I remember flying back from a scientific meeting with him, and was astonished to note that he had written a paper concerning some of the data that had been presented at the meeting by the time that we landed back in Toronto

Had I not met Roy when I did I would most likely have ended up being an Ophthalmologist, would not have been involved in so much fun and interesting research, and would not have written SEE your way to better health.

Thank you Roy.

Qualifications

The author's qualifications are as follows: Donald J. Mertens M.D.