The Voice of Canadian Pharmacology: The Canadian Society of Pharmacology and Therapeutics Celebrates Its Roots

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A lot can happen when people get together.

In 1953, some 1,700 people from 40 different countries attended the XIXth International Physiological Congress in Montreal, Canada. It was at this meeting that several members of the various Departments of Pharmacology in Canada with a primary interest in basic pharmacology got together and raised the idea of establishing a Canadian pharmacology society. By October 1954 a meeting in Toronto was held, a constitution discussed, and a title proposed: Pharmacological Society of Canada (PSC). In October 1956, at a gathering of 31 pharmacologists in Montreal, the PSC was officially founded.

The roots of the PSC go back much farther, however -- as far back as 1824, when the first Department of Pharmacology in Canada was founded at McGill as the Discipline of Chemistry, Pharmacy and Materia Medica, assuming the name Department of Pharmacology in 1887. Over the following years a number of Departments of Materia Medica/Pharmacology were created at other Canadian medical schools inducing Queen's, the University of Western Ontario and the University of Toronto.

The PSC was active for many years, holding annual meetings from 1957 on. A particular highlight was in 1994 when PSC hosted the IUPHAR World Congress of Pharmacology in Montreal. PSC also granted a number of awards recognizing achievements in research in pharmacology.

Roughly two decades after the PSC was founded, in 1978, researchers and scientists gathered at another international meeting, this one in Gothenburg, Sweden. Supported by Astra Pharmaceuticals, the meeting brought together, among others, a number of prominent Canadian clinical investigators. Conversations ensued and here the seeds were planted for the founding of another notable Canadian pharmacological society. Following the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Clinical Investigation in Ottawa, the idea was pursued in earnest and in February 1983 the Canadian Society for Clinical Pharmacology was formally established and incorporated.

The discussions in Gothenburg were driven in large part driven by the evolution of therapeutic research in Canada. In 1964 the Canadian Foundation for the Advancement of Therapeutics held a workshop at Ste. Adèle-en-Haut to promote drug research and the development of clinical pharmacology. Developments following this workshop included the creation of the Clinical Pharmacology Oenophile Society in 1974 at a meeting in Montreal and the establishment of a clinical pharmacology unit by Dr. John Ruedy at the Montreal General Hospital. The culmination of these efforts was the proposals by the attendees of the meeting in Gothenburg to create a new society.

Over the course of 1979 the founders of the new society were busy finding potential members and gathering organizational support. CSCP was informally founded with Dr. Dick Ogilvie as President, Dr. Stuart MacLeod as Secretary Treasurer, and Drs. Bill Mahon, Fred Aoki and George Carruthers as Councillors. After the formal founding of CSCP in 1983 the society continued to evolve. One early major achievement of the organization was the recognition in 1986 of clinical pharmacology as a formal sub-speciality by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Canada was one of the first countries to formalize and certify training in clinical pharmacology as a model cross-cutting bridging discipline.

Over the next several decades CSCP further developed, setting up a permanent society office and creating several awards that recognized achievements in research and service spanning the career path from trainee to senior investigator. CSCP also organized an annual meeting that, for years, was held concurrently with the September annual meeting of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. A decision by the Royal College to change the direction of their annual meeting to focus almost entirely on education meant that, beginning in 2000, CSCP had to reconsider with whom and when it met annually.

Independent annual meetings were held as well as meetings in partnership with other societies, including the American Society of Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics, the Canadian College of Clinical Pharmacy and the Canadian Association for Population Therapeutics. The latter two partnerships realized the organization of several joint Canadian Therapeutic Congresses.

As both the PSC and the CSCP evolved, it became increasingly clear that there were potential advantages to bringing basic and clinical pharmacology together. Following international precedence, most notably by the British Pharmacologic Society, conversations ensued in Quebec City between the then-presidents Drs. Stuart MacLeod (CSCP) and Kanji Nakatsu (PSC). It was recognized that many academic investigators were, in fact, members of both societies. Further, given the size of each society, it was suggested that key events, such as the annual meetings, would be more successful and effective if the two societies merged. Finally, at the time of the discussions, the evolution of drug discovery, investigation and evaluation was increasingly recognized to be a multi-disciplinary enterprise best suited to an organization with broad-based membership encompassing a range of expertise in basic and clinical pharmacology.

As the discussions with both societies proceeded, it was clear that many benefits would result from a merger. The final agreement was made in Quebec City at the CPT 2008 IX World Conference on Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, both organized and hosted by CSCP and NSERC under the auspices of the IUPHAR. Final preparations for the merger proceeded smoothly, including developing a suite of awards that recognized the traditions of both societies and the drafting of a new set of bylaws by Dr. James Hammond, the inaugural President of the Canadian Society of Pharmacology and Therapeutics (CSPT).

CSPT has been recognized by IUPHAR as the “Voice of Canadian Pharmacology,” fostering the

application of educational and research excellence to drug discovery and therapeutic choice by bringing together as a society a multidisciplinary group of individuals with broad interests in optimally safe and effective drug therapy.

Since the creation of the CSPT the tradition of joint meetings with partner societies has continued and indeed grown. CSPT has held joint meetings with a number of groups including the Safety Pharmacology Society, the Canadian Society of Pharmaceutical Science and the Canadian Chapter of the Controlled Release Society. These have been great successes, the most recent joint meeting taking in 2018 in Toronto where outstanding research in basic, clinical and translational pharmacology was presented in integrated joint symposia. The plans for future meetings are to continue to grow our tradition of joint meetings.

CSPT has evolved alongside the developments that have taken place within both regulatory and research environments. As one example, CSPT is becoming increasingly involved in education in pharmacology and therapeutics. As the therapeutic revolution in biological, cellular and protein therapy evolves CSPT will continue to advocate for and work with outstanding teams of investigators pushing the frontiers of pharmacology and therapeutics. We understand that a lot can happen when people get together.

References

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