

A Tribute to Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews: CIHR Institute of Aging Scientific Director, 2004–2011

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Preface

Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews has served as Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute of Aging since 2004. She will complete the final of two terms on July 31, 2011. The following tribute was submitted by current and former Chairs of the Institute Advisory Board in recognition of her achievements.

Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews has been a part of the CIHR Institute of Aging since its inception in 2001. Dr. Réjean Hébert was the inaugural Scientific Director (SD), and Anne's initial involvement was as a member and Vice-Chair of the Institute Advisory Board (IAB). The IAB met for the first time in February 2001 to begin the exciting and daunting task of determining what the Institute of Aging (IA) could be. Anne's leadership qualities were immediately evident. No one on the IAB (and this was a most impressive group of scientists and decision makers from the field of aging) asked more thoughtful and incisive questions, identified more relevant but not immediately obvious issues, put forward more persuasive arguments in discussions, and resolved more dilemmas through creative solutions than Anne. There is no question that her Newfoundland roots which continue to be reflected in her wonderful accent and turn of phrase have infused her style and make her a compelling presence in any group or audience of which she is a part.

Réjean Hébert resigned early in the life of the IA to become Dean of Medicine at the University of Sherbrooke, and it was not a surprise that the IAB unanimously recommended to Dr. Alan Bernstein, then President of CIHR, that Anne become Interim SD. She brought leadership experience from her positions at the University of Guelph, where she established and directed the Gerontology Research Centre, and the University of British Columbia, where she had been Associate Dean of Research & Graduate Studies and Dean pro tem of the Faculty of Arts. Fortunately for all,

she was selected to be the ongoing SD in the subsequent competition. Her capacity for leadership was immediately tested because one of Dr. Hébert's first initiatives as SD was to conceive and inaugurate the Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging (CLSA).

The CLSA is a national longitudinal study of adult development and aging. In this study, 50,000 Canadians between the ages of 45 and 85 will be contacted every three years for 20 years for the purpose of collecting information – social, health, environmental, genetic, and other biological information – to create a research platform. The platform will provide the opportunity for researchers to study the complex interplay of factors that affect how people experience aging, as well as factors that influence their health and quality of life. When Anne took over the SD position, the CLSA had been approved by the IAB and the team of three principal investigators had been appointed, but the initial protocol had not been developed and approved, and the tens of millions of dollars in funding necessary to launch the enterprise was not in place nor in sight. CIHR and the other 12 CIHR institutes had to be convinced that the CLSA was worthy of their support and funding. The CLSA would have struggled to get off the ground if Anne had not been completely committed to seeing it succeed and willing to devote the time, energy, strategic thinking, persuasive communication, and political guidance required to convince all the relevant parties, including the scientific community, that this unique, creative, and ambitious initiative was worthy of the resources required.

The title "Strategic Champion" is exquisitely suited to describing the role that Anne played with the CLSA over her entire term as SD. She functioned like the centre of a wheel with spokes going to the IAB, principal investigators, SDs of the other institutes, CIHR Governing Council, CIHR President and senior administrators, government officials, and the research

community within which many looked to the potential of the CLSA to realize their research objectives. Over the course of more than seven years, she kept that wheel turning through her enthusiasm and well-informed briefings and speeches to dozens of audiences. If the definition of leadership is to articulate a vision and convince relevant audiences to support that vision with energy and action, then Anne demonstrated true leadership. The CLSA is considered the IA's (and Anne's) most significant accomplishment, but it is not its only one.

While extensive background activity undertaken by Anne and the IA staff was devoted to moving the CLSA forward, Anne's leadership extended far beyond that. The IA was barely formed when Anne took over as SD. At that time, the few Canadian researchers who studied aging-related topics were scattered across the full breadth of scientific endeavours from basic science to epidemiologic and health services research and there was no one organization with which they all felt some sense of commonality. It was the IA's responsibility to create and grow a community out of this disparate group. As SD, Anne travelled the country visiting universities and research centres, drawing together aging-focused investigators from the same campus

and often initiating first introductions to each other. Beyond our borders, Anne sought partnerships with the United Kingdom, Japan, and China, resulting in a range of opportunities for mutually beneficial research collaborations. She also saw the critical importance of nurturing new scholars and the value of supporting this next generation through recognition awards, advanced training, and networking opportunities. The Institute's extremely successful annual Summer Program in Aging (SPA) will forever be associated with Anne's delightful concept of "going to the SPA for a brain-massage".

While there is still more building and expanding to be done, the community that identifies with aging has grown in numbers and in research activity as demonstrated by success in CIHR open competitions and uptake of IA-specific competitions. Anne has driven all of these initiatives. She is a visible face not only of the IA but also of aging research in Canada as well as internationally. Warm, approachable, inclusive, enthusiastic, supportive, creative, energetic, determined, and single-minded when necessary, Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews has been Canada's unparalleled champion of aging research, and the community is so much stronger for it.