Eight medical leaders inducted into Hall of Fame

A recipient of the CMA's F.N.G. Starr Award and a missionary physician were among 8 laureates recently inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. Founded in 1994 in London, Ont., the hall is sponsored by the CMA and several other organizations.

Research scientist Dr. Charles Beer worked closely with the late Dr. Robert Noble to isolate and purify vinblastine from the leaves of the Madagascar periwinkle plant. The discovery was considered a milestone in the management of Hodgkin disease and testicular cancer.

Beer is professor emeritus at the University of British Columbia and honorary senior research scientist at the Department of Cancer Endocrinology with the British Columbia Cancer Agency.

Dr. Wilfred Bigelow, one of Canada’s most distinguished surgeons, was the 1992 recipient of the CMA’s F.N.G. Starr Award. His discovery that lowering the body’s core temperature also lowered its oxygen requirements helped pioneer open-heart surgery, and his research into hypothermia led him to develop the pacemaker in 1951. His work revolutionized heart surgery and improved the lives of millions of people with heart disease. He is semi-retired and lives in Toronto.

Known internationally for his pioneering investigations of tumours of the brain and nervous system, Dr. Pierre Masson retired as chair of the Department of Pathology at the Université de Montréal in 1954. One of the most distinguished histopathologists of his generation, he was highly regarded for his research, teaching, publications and innovative histologic techniques. He died in 1959.

A pioneer in the discipline of neuropsychology, Dr. Brenda Milner’s detailed and methodical long-term studies of patients before and after brain excisions added substantially to the scientific understanding of the structure of the brain. Milner is a distinguished lecturer in brain research and the first Dorothy Killam Professor of Neurology and Neurosurgery at the Montreal Neurological Institute and McGill University.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell left an indelible mark on the medical and social history of Newfoundland. In 1892 he travelled to the tip of Newfoundland’s Northern Peninsula, and in many cases was the only physician the isolated communities had ever seen. Physician, missionary and friend to his patients, Grenfell built a hospital in St. Anthony with funds raised through speaking tours and books publicizing the hardships endured by the fishermen. Knighted in 1927, Grenfell died in Vermont in 1940.

Dr. Louis Siminovitch was instrumental in the discovery of the genetic causes of muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis and made important contributions to bacterial and animal virus genetics, somatic cell and human genetics, and cancer research. A renowned teacher, he also played a fundamental role in establishing 3 major medical research centres, including the Ontario Cancer Institute. He is known for his leadership both as a medical scientist and visionary.

The discovery of vinblastine is credited to Dr. Robert Noble, who was associate director of the Collip Medical Research Laboratory at the University of Western Ontario. Noble was a skilled and ingenious scientist who received numerous awards for his research. Noble, who died in 1990, concluded his career at the University of British Columbia and the BC Cancer Agency.

As chief of pediatrics at Hotel Dieu hospital in Windsor, Ont., Dr. Henri Breault addressed accidental poisoning of children through a public-education campaign and then by conceiving the idea of proof containers for medications and hazardous household products. The containers are now mandatory throughout North America. Breault, who practised in Windsor for 41 years, died in 1983.—Steven Wharry