

# Short Introduction to the History of the Centre for Activity and Ageing

## The Centre for Activity and Ageing

The Centre for Activity and Ageing was created by an act in the Senate in 1989 and was changed to the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging in 2000. The events leading up to the initial establishment of the centre in 1989 are important to understand the present CCAA. Included with this note is a more complete history of the work with activity and ageing at Western. In brief, the current CCAA owes much to the early research work at The University of Western Ontario in rehabilitating post-coronary patients started by Peter Rechnitzer in the early 1960's. David Cunningham joined this work in 1969 to set up the research laboratory and help run a multi-centre study with Peter until 1976. David decided to focus new efforts in 1978 on the study of the ageing of the cardiovascular systems. He persuaded Peter to join him in 1980 when they went to see an ageing centre at the Department of Physiology in The University of Nottingham. In 1981 a research study called the Retirement Research Study was initiated and provided much information on the exercise training of the elderly. More importantly, it led to the setting up of a major survey of elderly ages 65 to 85 in London that was called "The Self Paced Walking Study". This study 1988 to 1990 provided many important reports on the ageing and longevity of the elderly. In the middle of the 1980's Donald Paterson became more involved with the ageing studies and was to play the most important role in the centre from the mid 1990's to the present. He assumed the position of Research Director in 1992 until this day.

## A Place to Call Home

In 1989, Peter Rechnitzer managed to secure office, Research, and exercise facilities at Mount St. Joseph. The centre, part of Kinesiology and Physiology at Western was now also part of St. Joseph's Hospital. David Cunningham who had two research laboratories at Western one in Thames Hall and one in the Medical School, Department of Physiology decided to move these units to Mount St. Joseph as the main research facilities at the new site. The University Senate created the Centre for Activity and Ageing in 1989 as a result of the application written by David Cunningham a year earlier. Since it was now a research centre it needed a director. The need for a director was a new phase for the research centre. Peter and David decided that Peter who came to the centre one or two half days per week would serve as the first director; David was the Research Director as he was full time on location. David Cunningham became the second director when Peter retired in 1992.

## Leading the Way

The centre changed its focus in the 1990's from primarily a research unit to one in which the service function was more important. Nancy Ecclestone became the new director in 1994 until Gareth Jones took over in 2002 Clara Fitzgerald became the program director in 2005 until the present day. Under Nancy Ecclestone's leadership Don Paterson, now the research director took a more active role in the direction of the centre and its ultimate focus on leadership training in exercise and aging work. The centre developed a leadership syllabus that is now used across Canada and has made it the pre-eminent aging centre. Frequent conferences are held to facilitate leadership skills among those involved in delivery of training programmes for the elderly.

A complete history of the centre and the creation of a teaching unit for Universities of Ontario called the Ontario Exercise Group are provided in the linked pages as written by David Cunningham. Also, many early photographs of the centre and those who made it work are included.

Dr. David Cunningham

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