



Philip Berger MD

Progress in medical science and health care often involves political and social challenges. Physicians resist the ravages of disease, and sometimes, the agendas and interests of governments. Dr. Philip Berger's 40-year career is a record of advocacy and activism on behalf of health care for all people, regardless of their circumstances, and sometimes against powerful resistance. Associate Professor, University of Toronto, Faculty of Medicine and Chief of Department of Family and Community Medicine, St. Michael's Hospital (1997-2013), Dr. Berger has been at the forefront of many battles for enlightened and humane health care despite indifference or opposition.

Refugees, addicts, the homeless, the poor, members of the LGBT community, people with HIV/AIDS, and victims of torture have all found an advocate in Dr. Berger who worked to promote methadone treatment, needle exchanges, documentation and recognition of the aftereffects of torture, academic infirmaries for the homeless, and clinical treatment of AIDS in Africa. Many medical practices now considered standard were once controversial initiatives requiring courage to defend and achieve.

A graduate of the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Berger joined the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto in 1984, at the onset of the global AIDS crisis. In 1987 he founded the Toronto HIV Primary Care Physicians Group and established the HIV Project Centre Primary Care Mentor Program, educating doctors and advocating for people with HIV. He led high profile campaigns to persuade government officials of the HIV prevention benefits of methadone and needle exchange programs. In 2004, he led the first Ontario Hospital Association team to Lesotho, where the team joined with Lesotho's first publicly funded AIDS clinic, expanding his work on behalf of HIV patients worldwide. Dr. Berger has also advocated for victims of torture, founding the Amnesty International Canadian Medical Network (English), and co-founding the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture to raise public awareness of torture both nationally and internationally.

In 2012 Dr. Berger co-founded and co-chaired Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, coordinating nationwide protests by physicians against cuts to refugee health, which led to a successful Federal Court of Canada Charter challenge restoring health coverage to about 100,000 refugees. Dr. Berger has been involved in investigations of police treatment of detainees, written about the politics and professional practices of the Ontario Medical Association, and is a tireless champion of social justice and accessible health care in Canada and the world. He has been a crusader never afraid of the controversial, but above all, he has served the needs of the sick and those who have suffered abuses of power.