



F. Clarke Fraser, MD PhD

Spanning the fields of science and medicine, Dr. F. Clarke Fraser was one of the creators of the discipline of medical genetics in North America, and laid the foundations in the field of Genetic Counselling, which has enhanced the lives of patients worldwide. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Fraser pioneered work in the genetics of cleft palate and popularized the concept of multifactorial disease. Dr. Fraser was an iconic figure in Canadian medicine, as well as a biomedical pioneer, a fine teacher, and an outstanding scientist.

Dr. Fraser was indeed an original thinker. As a fearless groundbreaker blessed with rare insight, he initially chose the medical field before being captivated by genetics while earning his Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Acadia University in 1940. He then enrolled in McGill University where he obtained his Master of Science a year later. After serving in the Canadian Air Force as a bombardier in WWII, Dr. Fraser returned to McGill where he obtained his MD and PhD, and carried out seminal research in teratology and syndromology.

Before Dr. Fraser took the stage, genetics and medicine were two very separate fields. There was no vision for the potential of genetics in human medicine. Dr. Fraser soon turned his attention from fruit flies and mice to human genetics. At only 30 years of age, he became the founder of the Department of Medical Genetics at the Montreal Children's Hospital – the first of its kind in a Canadian paediatric hospital. The department was aptly renamed the F. Clarke Fraser Clinical Genetics Centre at McGill University in 1995.

But Dr. Fraser's contributions reached far beyond the lab to the very lives of patients everywhere. His gentle, compassionate approach was much appreciated by his patients and he passed this warmth and understanding onto a succession of graduate students, physicians and genetic counsellors in both Canada and the United States. Ever contributing in a myriad of ways, Dr. Fraser's classroom techniques were renowned among students and he coauthored several textbooks, many still used today.

Dr. Fraser has served as president of the major North American societies in Genetics and Teratology and has won almost every award in his field. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, has won the Wilder Penfield Prix de Québec and is an Officer of the Order of Canada. He was a founding co-director of the Medical Research Council of Canada Group in Medical Genetics, the longest lasting group in the history of the MRC.