



Charles Tator, MD PhD

Since the early 1970s, Dr. Charles Tator has had a resounding impact on spinal cord injury research, prevention and treatment, and on training our next generation of leading surgical scientists. An eminent scientist, neurosurgeon, professor and administrator, his laboratory was the first in Canada to study acute spinal cord injury from a basic science perspective. Dr. Tator's research transformed our world's understanding of spinal cord injury and, in 1978, he developed one of the first experimental models of spinal cord injury in small laboratory animals.

In addition, Dr. Tator showed that post-traumatic ischemia is a major secondary injury mechanism. He invented the inclined plane technique of functional assessment. Dr. Tator was one of the first to recognize the proliferation of endogenous stem cells in the injured adult mammalian spinal cord, and to assess the therapeutic value of transplantation of adult spinal cord derived stem cells after injury. He developed the first acute spinal cord injury unit in Canada, and he is known for the introduction of halo vests for treatment.

The breadth of Dr. Tator's influence is perhaps best manifested by his work in prevention, particularly related to sports and recreation. His advocacy efforts resulted in the adoption of new legislation and guidelines to prevent spinal cord injury in hockey. In 1992, he founded ThinkFirst Canada, an organization that educates young people about safety.

A dedicated, kind and skillful surgeon, Dr. Tator's loyalty to his patients is legendary. As chair of the division of neurosurgery at the University of Toronto (1989-1999), Dr. Tator fostered the growth of Canada's surgical scientist training program, believing that aspiring academic surgeons should train in science at the highest level. His program gained national prominence and was admired by neurosurgical departments across Canada.

Dr. Tator played a key role in developing the Canadian Brain and Nerve Health Coalition (2002) which brought Canadian organizations together to promote increased research and public awareness of neurological conditions. Among many awards, Dr. Tator was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada (2000) and inducted into the Terry Fox Hall of Fame (2003).

