

Research and Teaching in Infectious Diseases: A Family's Commitment

Thanks to the enthusiasm, generosity and dedication of a single family, the Canadian Foundation for Infectious Diseases (CFID) is able to present two annual awards –one each to trainees and teachers.

Award for Excellence in Research

Established in memoriam by his wife, Lourdes, and his son Dr. John M. Embil, the Juan A. Embil Award for Excellence in Research in Infectious Diseases has been granted annually since 2002. The award commemorates the senior Dr. Embil (1923-94), who held the positions of Professor of Microbiology and Community Health and Epidemiology and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Dalhousie University. His research included numerous studies on cytomegalovirus, Chlamydia trachomatis, hepatitis B, arboviruses and a multitude of other pathogens and clinical conditions observed in the Atlantic provinces. The prize in his name is offered to current or recent trainees whose published work will have a far-reaching and durable impact on the health of Canadians. "My father's vision was to stimulate others, primarily trainees and people who are interested in pursuing research in the field of infectious diseases," remarked Dr. John Embil.

A two-time recipient, Dr. Andrea Boggild, Tropical Disease Unit, Toronto General Hospital, expressed pride in having her work acknowledged "with such a prestigious award in honour of such a remarkable clinician and scientist.... This recognition certainly motivated my continued work in surveillance of travel-related illness and Leishmania diagnostics. Receiving the award in 2008 was instrumental to my ability to maintain a research collaboration on Leishmania diagnostics in Peru as the funds provided critical support for needed supplies in an under-resourced setting."

Mentorship Award

Dr. John M. Embil followed his father into a career in medicine. Since 1997 he has been a consultant in infectious diseases at the University of Manitoba's Health Sciences Centre, Winnipeg, where he is also an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine, Section of Infectious Diseases and Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba, and the Director of the Infection Prevention and Control Unit and the Health Sciences Centre. He is an expert on blastomycosis and infection control.

In 2010, Dr. John Embil endowed the Dr. John M. Embil Mentorship Award in Infectious Diseases. This award is for specialists in clinical infectious disease whose mentorship inspires trainees' interest and excitement in the field. It acknowledges activities such as assisting students in preparing their work for presentation or publication, finding financial aid, and guiding and encouraging trainees on their chosen career path, as well as supporting excellence in patient care and global health promotion.

The philosophy underlying this award dovetails nicely with Dr. Embil's own passion for the study of infectious diseases, devotion to teaching and mentorship, and clear dedication to the communication of infection-prevention practices for professionals and the public alike. Dr. Embil enjoys employing a light-hearted touch in his educational approach. To support National Infection Control Week in 2011, Dr. Embil – or, more precisely, his alter ego, Soapy – starred in a video on the importance of hand hygiene. This superhero character clad in orange tights previously appeared in other videos and at other venues to promote hand washing and other hygienic behaviours. Dr. Embil also produced and funded a booklet, entitled "You'll Like Clean Hands" (<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/ipc/soapy.php>), in which Soapy tries to educate a non-believer on the value of hand hygiene.



Dr. John M. Embil (L) presented the first CFID award for mentorship to Dr. Allan Ronald

The first recipient of the John M. Embil award, Dr. Allan Ronald of the University of Manitoba, described it as "an unexpected but most welcome surprise," in part because he had not previously thought about his work in terms of mentorship. "It made me think more about my role in the discipline of global health: How can my experience facilitate medical graduates (both Canadian and developing country clinicians) to become the clinician scientists the world needs to improve individual and population health?"

Dr. Embil reflected on the role of charitable donations in supporting the goals of the relatively small infectious disease community in Canada. "If someone has done something above and beyond, they should be acknowledged", he remarked.

Role of CFID

Established in 1989, the CFID is a registered charity committed to the support of research and dissemination of knowledge pertaining to the prevention, diagnosis, control and treatment of infectious diseases. It works closely with other infectious disease organizations such as the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Canada (AMMI Canada) and the Community and Hospital Infection Control Association of Canada (CHICA-Canada).

"We are fortunate in having the Embil family as a model of charitable giving in support of research, teaching and professional development in the field of infectious diseases, all strongly-held goals of CFID that have been recently emphasized at a strategic planning session, said Dr. Susan Richardson, President, CFID.

The Embil awards for 2012 were presented at the AMMI Canada – CACMID Annual Conference, May 3 in Vancouver.

Juan A. Embil award winners	2010	Donald Vinh
	2002	Deepali Kumar
	2003	Caroline Quach-Thanh
	2004	Patrick Tang
	2005	Andrea Boggild
	2006	Duncan Webster
	2007	Tom Szakacs
	2008	Andrea Boggild
		John M. Embil award winners
	2010	Allan Ronald
	2011	John Conly
	2012	Jonathan Angel

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