



LEGACY OF 150 YEARS: *Preparing Doctors for a Changing Society*

# Mini-Medical Schools: Enhancing Medical Care

Lewis L. Tomalty, PhD, FCCM (CCM)

Queen's University recently held its first Mini-Medical School, a biomedical educational series for the public. The six-week series included topics ranging from emerging infectious diseases to advances in the diagnosis and treatment of dementia. Those in attendance were fascinated, and left with a thirst and a demand for more.

Mini-medical schools are not new. The first was launched in 1990 as a community outreach program under the direction of Dr. J. John Cohen, an immunologist at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. He wanted to offer the public more than single health topics which were sporadically supported and offered by community groups. Dr. Cohen's idea was to create a program featuring basic scientific con-

cepts and topics typically offered during the first two years of medical school training. His program was an outstanding success and was soon followed by similar programs throughout North America.

Today, over 70 medical schools and biomedical research institutes offer mini-medical schools to the public. They are structured to either:

- present an overview of biomedical topics taught in early years of medical school,
- offer a more in-depth look at specific topics, such as cancer, or
- do both of the above through an overview of the basic science concepts underlying a specific medical topic, or condition.

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**Lewis L. Tomalty, PhD, FCCM (CCM)**

Associate dean, continuing medical education, and department head, microbiology and immunology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

Mini-medical schools have nearly reached the point where the curricula are undergoing review and renewal to a greater extent than regular medical school curricula. The University of Toronto

has even expanded its mini-medical school to offer electives for those with a wish to explore a topic in greater detail.

The incredible popularity of these programs, regardless of the type or approach, sends us all a very strong message. There is a desire to learn, which is likely nowhere more important than in the biomedical sciences, a field that touches everyone's life. Those in attendance are truly interested in the fundamental concepts behind diseases. Where else can they attain this knowledge?

We live in a 'google' era; an era that provides instant access to medical information, which, while it can be very well presented at times, can also be biased, commercial, and extreme. How do the public sort through such information so as to really understand it? How do they self-educate, increase self-awareness, and enhance self-management? Given the nature in which

scientific advancements are often portrayed by the media, it is no wonder there is a wish for medical information to be presented in a clear, concise, and unambiguous fashion.

As this and other forms of organized, accredited continuing medical education are essential in maintaining a particular level of knowledge in the practice of medicine, the mini-medical school is one important route to ensuring a strong public understanding of biomedical information. It is important to remember that our role in medicine is also to act as educators on a daily basis, as the public doesn't have the same opportunity to enhance their understanding of medical issues. Hopefully, the result is a more informed patient who will be a better partner in determining an approach to his/her medical care. CME

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The Alzheimer Society provides information, support and funds research into the cause and cure. To find out more contact your local Alzheimer Society.

[www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)  
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