

FJW Timmermans Award

A few years ago the YMA created an award for the purpose of honouring one of our own who has made a major contribution to medicine in the north.

The terms of reference were that the recipient be a physician who has worked in the north and in particular the Yukon Territory and has distinguished themselves by making their contribution in the areas of:

- professional work
- association work
- community, hospital, territory work, or
- work abroad

The award was named in honour of its first recipient.

Dr. Franciscus (Frank) Jacobus Waltherus Timmermans was born in Holland on New Year's Eve, 1945 and his family emigrated to Australia in 1951. He received his medical degree from the University of Queensland in 1969 and then spent two years in the Royal Australian Air Force, stationed in Wagga Wagga.

In 1973 Frank and family emigrated to Oshawa, Ontario and not long after they moved to Iqaluit from Frank to assume the position of Director of Health, Baffin Zone, for Health and Welfare Canada. His responsibilities included the administration of health care for 300,000 square miles of Canadian Arctic territory, including 12 outlying nursing stations and cottage hospitals. Demonstrating his talent for languages he also picked up the Inuktitut language of the Eastern Arctic along the way.

Frank then undertook a residency in general surgery at Dalhousie University, Halifax, receiving his FRCPS(C) in 1980. Not long after he, with his family, made the cross-country drive to Whitehorse, setting up practice in Pine Medical Centre.

His exemplary contribution to the health and wellbeing of Yukoners is well recognized. This was not only in the area of general surgery where he brought new ideas and introduced new programs in his commitment to providing the best possible care. He pushed hard for First Nations issues – those involving health but also anything that would improve the determinants of health of aboriginal people. Being a first-hand observer to the effects of a damaged culture he strove to make changes that would restore self-respect and self-esteem. He did this by showing unreserved respect for the First Nations people.

In 1986 Frank went "walkabout", spending three years, with his partner Trish, circumnavigating the world on their sailboat. They visited many remote areas of underdeveloped countries and Frank spent time as Chief of Surgery in Kimberly General Hospital, South Africa where he was the

only referral surgeon for 2.5 million black South Africans in apartheid South Africa – as he put it, “a sobering experience”. Returning to the Yukon in 1989 he recommenced his general surgery practice with long-time friend and resident surgeon, Dr. David Storey. He became more actively involved in the Yukon Medical Association and was its president between 1991-93.

He continued to take intermittent sabbaticals to fulfill a desire to provide medical services in areas of the world where it seemed most desperately needed. This included Angola where he was a visiting professor teaching surgery to Angolan physicians; then working with the International Medical Corps in Somalia; and with Médecins Sans Frontières in Bosnia and Afghanistan.

After his stint in Bosnia he knew he needed to expand his medical skills if he was going to make the difference he really wanted to make in these war ravaged countries. He obtained his Masters of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University in 1997, specializing in international and refugee health.

One of his new duties upon returning to the Yukon was as the new Chief Medical Officer of Health. During this time he oversaw and wrote the Health Status Report for the Yukon and two Health Summits that were intended to focus on the health needs of Yukoners and how they could be best met.

A devastating brain tumour was discovered just as he was trying to decide whether to become one of the chief medical officers in Afghanistan or become part of the Médecins Sans Frontières head office in Brussels. Frank passed away at the age of 57... he had a great deal more to give and the world lost a tireless worker for the improvement of humanity.

Frank was a true visionary... someone we don't often see.... someone who carried us all forward with the force of his personality and the strength of his convictions.

**To nominate a physician for the awards committee, please send an email to office@yukondoctors.ca
Please include the name of the physician you are nominating and explain how they meet the award criteria outlined above. Thank you!**