

## Canadian Digestive Health Foundation: Interview with the new President, Dr Richard Fedorak

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The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF) was established in 1994 but has yet to realize its potential. Dr Richard Fedorak has recently been appointed as the new President of the CDHF. In this interview, I discuss with him the exciting new plans that he and others have for this organization.

**SV:** What exactly is the CDHF and how did it come about?

**RF:** The CDHF was born in the early 1990s by a group of visionary Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) leaders who recognized the need for a national digestive health foundation that would present the opportunity, and have the capacity, to edify the public and raise charitable funds for education and research into digestive health and disease.

**SV:** The CDHF is said to be in a state of revitalization. What does that mean?

**RF:** The CDHF is indeed in a state of revitalization, and we now have a clear mission and objectives in place. The CAG, and the members of the CDHF Board, recognize the importance of this foundation and the importance that it become a major force in public instruction and fundraising for CAG research and public education over the next decade. The CAG is committed to this objective and has thus invested \$150,000 per year for three successive years to ensure that the CDHF will grow into a self-sustaining foundation.

**SV:** Why do we need a national digestive health foundation?

**RF:** There are several small foundations in Canada associated with specific disease entities.

However, there is no national foundation that is devoted to the full spectrum of digestive health. Having this type of foundation is critically important in Canada, because digestive illness represents 15% of the total direct economic burden of all Canadian health care costs (exceeding cardiac, respiratory and central nervous diseases). Furthermore, digestive diseases represent one of the highest direct economic burdens at \$8.02 billion annually. We need a potent national foundation that can bring attention to digestive health and disease, and play a role in finding solutions.

**SV:** What are the goals of the CDHF and what is your team doing to realize these goals?



*Dr Richard N Fedorak is Professor of Medicine in the Division of Gastroenterology at the University of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta). In addition to his role as President of the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation, he is currently Chairman of the Centre of Excellence for Gastrointestinal Inflammation and Immunity Research, and Director of the Northern Alberta Clinical Trials and Research Centre*

**RF:** The CDHF Board and I have three main goals: to ensure that the foundation's infrastructure is fiscally solid through the establishment of a \$2 million endowment; to sustain permanent positions for an executive director and a fund development officer; and to raise \$2 million annually in charitable dollars by 2010.

**SV:** The CDHF has struggled in the past and yet you have very optimistic fundraising objectives. What makes you think the foundation's ability to raise funds will change so dramatically now?

**RF:** The CDHF has created a comprehensive strategy to achieve two major fundraising goals by 2010: to raise \$2 million annually in support of public digestive education and awareness initiatives, and research, conducted by CAG members; and to establish a \$2 million endowment fund that will support the ongoing infrastructure of the CDHF.

We encourage CAG members to support this foundation by investing in its future with a charitable donation. To meet our goal, we require a donation of \$75 per month for three years from each and every CAG member. You will receive a charitable tax receipt for your donation and will be directly supporting the ongoing development of the CDHF, which will allow us to prioritize the needs of patients with digestive diseases, bring the benefits of research to the forefront of public awareness and government consideration, and highlight the need for increased professional resources.

**SV:** What impact do you think the CDHF will have on the gastrointestinal community and the health of Canadians?

**RF:** The success of the CDHF as a national foundation will be based on it fulfilling the following objectives for the public:

- reduce the incidence of digestive disease by promoting and preserving digestive health;
- improve the quality of life of people living with digestive disease;
- support people suffering from digestive diseases and the professionals who care for them; and

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- enhance Canadian digestive health research and education.

**SV:** How does the foundation support the members of the CAG?

**RF:** The CDHF is a foundation for the public. The CAG is a society for its professional members. These are distinct differences and reflect the legal and tax-related definitions for a foundation and society. Nevertheless, the CDHF has selected the CAG to be the beneficiary of its charitable fundraising activities directed toward research into digestive health and disease.

**SV:** Why should the gastroenterology community support the CDHF?

**RF:** In this era of reduced support for education and research, it is important that the gastroenterology community speaks with a common and effective voice to the public and the government. The CDHF is in a position to provide the public with the digestive health and disease education that they require to make informed decisions, and subsequently to influence the political arena. This is a critical process – currently lacking in

gastroenterology – that will enhance clinical and research resources, not only for patients, but for CAG members.

**SV:** What challenges lie ahead for the foundation?

**RF:** To ensure its success, the CDHF has joined forces with the CAG. Specifically, an executive director and fund development officer have been secured. In the past, the success of the CDHF was based solely on the energies of busy gastroenterologists. As you, the readers, know, busy physicians often have little time left at the end of a day to devote to the development, management and successful running of an organization like the CDHF. Having an executive director and a fundraising manager who can provide this important leadership and guidance is critical for the CDHF's successful development.

**SV:** How will you measure the success of the CDHF?

**RF:** We will consider the CDHF to be successful when it is recognized by the public, the government and professionals as a national foundation for digestive health and disease. To achieve this level of success, a foundation that is vibrant, viable and supported by the CAG is required.

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