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Armand Frappier, MD

A moving force, a trailblazer, a visionary. These are some of the many accolades used to describe Dr. Armand Frappier, the founder of the first institution dedicated to medical research in Quebec and a pioneer in medical research. Born in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec, the direction of Dr. Frappier's life and work was forever changed when his mother died of tuberculosis. He became the driving force behind anti-tuberculosis vaccinations, and a major figure in the development of public health and in the advancement of research in infectious diseases.

Graduating with a degree in medicine from the University of Montréal in 1930, Dr. Frappier spent two years at the Institut Pasteur in Paris working with the developers of the tuberculosis vaccine strain Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) before returning to become Director of laboratories for the Saint-Luc Hospital.

In 1938 he created an institution dedicated to medical research: The Institut de Microbiologie et d'Hygiène de Montréal. It was the first French-speaking School of Hygiene and Public Health and early on became associated with the University of Montréal where he influenced a new generation of microbiologists. It now stands as a world-class institution that bears his name: the INRS-Institut Armand-Frappier, a member of the International Network of Pasteur Institutes since 2004. His vision and active participation in the Institut brought about the creation and commercialization of vaccines and other biological products that formed the basis for a major business enterprise in Quebec.

Dr. Frappier's life-saving work is also valued in the very real impact he had on the health and well-being of people across North America in the deadly battle against tuberculosis. Beginning in 1930, Dr. Frappier became an advocate for full-scale, anti-tuberculosis vaccinations in North America using the BCG vaccine. This innovative work resulted in vaccine records that are still used today for epidemiological studies linking vaccination to unexpected beneficial effects. Dr. Frappier was also the first to demonstrate the effect of BCG vaccination in reducing mortality due to childhood leukemia, and, during the poliomyelitis epidemic of the 1950s, pioneered virology – introducing the Salk vaccine and creating the first Human Diagnostic Virology Laboratory in Quebec.

His work in the development of freeze-drying human serum, in collaboration with the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Red Cross during WWII, earned him the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

Dr. Frappier was truly a force in Quebec and Canadian research and medicine and his impact is seen in a long list of honours and awards. Among them, Companion of the Order of Canada, Officer of the Royal Order of Quebec, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Officer of the Académie de France. In 2000, Canada Post honoured Dr. Frappier with a postage stamp titled: Armand Frappier: Champion Disease Fighter.