



APERCEVOIR: THE PEOPLE OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

Dr. Margaret Steele

Lind Grant-Oyeye

Dr. Margaret Steele's career spans nearly 30 years and includes a decade of progressive decanal experience at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at The University of Western Ontario and, since 2016, the dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She has been a full professor of psychiatry since 2008. In March 2022, she began the additional role of Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) at Memorial University. Dr. Steele has been a distinguished leader in child and adolescent psychiatry in Canada. She has been the president of the Ontario Psychiatric Association, president of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, president of the Association of Professors in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Canada and a member of the Canadian Psychiatric Association Board. She led the successful application at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for child and adolescent psychiatry to become a recognized subspecialty. This has resulted in the development of national standards for the discipline, while at the same time ensuring that children and youth with mental illness, and their families, would be provided with the best evidence-based care. She is the first Canadian to be a member of the Association of the American Medical Colleges Council of Dean Fellow. In May 2021 she was appointed as the Chair of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Council of Deans Fellowship Committee. In 2018, because of her contributions to research and science, Dr. Steele was elected as a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. In 2019, she was named Professor Emerita at The University of Western Ontario. She became chair of the board of the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada in April 2022. Dr. Steele brings to us a proven track record of success in senior leadership.

Lind Grant-Oyeye (LGO): Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview for JCACAP.

Margaret Steele (MS): It is my pleasure!

LGO: What can you tell us about your background?

MS: Again, my pleasure. Going back to my early youth, I was born in Toronto but spent much of my life in London, Ontario. Youngest of five children and I was the only one to go to university.

LGO: The first at university? It must have been an exciting experience.

MS: There is a big age gap between my siblings and me. My parents were older when I was born. They did not have money for post-secondary education as they were in World War II. My mom was a war bride from York, England. My dad was an air traffic controller in the Canadian forces based in England. He worked as an electrician when they returned to Canada.

I went to medical school at Western, thinking I was going to be a microbiologist, but my supervisor said if I wanted to obtain big grants then it would be important to become a medical doctor. During my medical school training, there was a child psychiatrist, Dr. Sandra Fisman, who was always giving engaging lectures about children and adolescents who had mental health problems, and I became very interested in pursuing a career working with children and adolescents. I went on to McMaster for an old-fashioned internship and returned to Western University for psychiatry. I was a faculty member for 25 years. I am a professor emeritus at Western. I still do some child and adolescent psychiatry when I am able, but not as much as I would like.

LGO: What can you tell us about your personal experience in academia?

MS: I have always looked for ways to improve service. I always try to integrate academics with clinical care.

I initially did outpatient clinics. I also worked in the area of autism. I did traveling clinics as well. I then became involved in education. The Schulich leadership supported me in pursuing a masters in medical education. I have had the support of mentors. I have been involved in academics in various aspects. I co-led the initial application to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for the recognition of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry as a sub-specialty.

I have been fortunate to work with a lot of amazing people. I had two amazing mentors, Dr. Sandra Fisman, child and adolescent psychiatrist, and Dr. Carol Herbert, dean of medicine at Schulich Medicine & Dentistry. I have achieved beyond what I thought would have been possible. My role at this point is to empower others to achieve beyond what they think possible.

LGO: You have had quite a journey. You have served and helped shape the child and adolescent psychiatry landscape in Canada.

MS: I would say my child psychiatry training has helped prepare me for leadership. As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, you work with so many systems: e.g., school boards, families, the justice department, and others. You learn to network, bring everyone together, deal with challenges, and work together towards a solution.

LGO: That is a great observation. The daily work of a child and adolescent psychiatrist usually involves working on a team and liaising with clinical partners, even outside the core team.

MS: And, of course, I have had wonderful mentors.

LGO: As a female in leadership, is there something that comes to mind that you wish people did not say to or about women in leadership?

MS: Comments are often subtle; sometimes, they are not so subtle. When I am with a group of people and introduce myself, they often think I am the associate dean, or something. When I say, “No, I am the dean, “they may ask, “you mean the dean, dean?”. When my bio is read out, there have been comments that would not be said to a man, for example, “I did not realize you were that accomplished”. In the past, there would be jokes in the workplace such as, “It is just a woman thing.”

LGO: The workplace experience for women seems to be an evolving situation. For example, a recent study indicated that more universities are recruiting women into leadership but retaining women in academic leadership remains a

problem. What do you think could be done to improve the retention of women in leadership?

MS: Recent studies have shown that women are over mentored but under sponsored. It takes a long time before they get to put what they have learned into action. Those in positions of influence should be aware of the women in their institutions to recognize their potential and give them opportunities to serve. The other thing that I think would help is flexible working time. A better work-life balance is important.

LGO: You emphasize the need to shift from over mentoring to providing opportunities for women to demonstrate their skills. You also alluded to work schedules. As dean, what is your typical workday like?

MS: My schedule varies from one day to another day. I review my schedule for three weeks in advance. I meet with various people; for example, I receive briefs from my Chief Operating Officer regarding projects such as ongoing construction work or work planned. I meet with the associate deans, sometimes with the deputy health minister, and with student representatives. In addition, there are meetings related to hiring.

LGO: From the description of your schedule, it takes many meetings to run a medical school.

MS: Yes, it does!

LGO: What recreational activities do you enjoy?

MS: I love traveling. I love meeting new people and trying out new things. I like the theater and psychological thrillers, especially British ones. I like Coronation Street. I watch it every day.

LGO: Every day?

MS: Oh, yes, every day!

LGO: A few years ago, Coronation Street had a suspenseful storyline with Tracy, the villain. It was when Keith Duffy from Boy band was still in it.

MS: Yes, Tracy!

MS: I also like to spend time with my family and friends. I also make time to go to the gym. I have a personal trainer who helps me out.

LGO: I was wondering as well, for what are you grateful?

MS: The love and support of my family and friends. Also, the mentors who have helped me along the way. If someone had told me in medical school that I was going to be the dean of a medical school, I would not have believed it. It was never my life goal. Now, whether in clinical practice or when I am teaching students, I like to empower people.

LGO: You mentioned that you still undertake some clinical work with youths. Teens sometimes use slang in communication. Do you have a favorite teen slang?

MS: I have to laugh at that. “OMG” stands out for me.

LGO: What historical figure would you like to play in a movie?

MS: Jennie Trout. She was actually the first female to receive a license to practice medicine in Canada. The College of Physicians of Ontario licensed her. She had her own experiences of mental health problems and overcame them.

LGO: Do you have a favorite quote?

MS: Dr. Steve Wartman, a previous medical school dean in the United States and past president of the Association of Academic Health Science Centers, said “leadership is basking in the glow of others”

LGO: You mentioned earlier that you had thought about specializing in microbiology during medical school. What other career choices have you considered at one point or another?

MS: The irony of it all, I was on a waiting list for medical school. I was going to study actuarial sciences. I am not sure if I am good at it, but the other thing I thought about was being an interior designer. I love interior design. I have taken some courses in the past.

LGO: Regarding medical school admissions, what changes have you noticed regarding the qualities medical schools desire in a potential medical student?

MS: There is more of a focus on a holistic perspective, not just basing it on MCAT, standardized testing, and marks. As well as looking at equity and diversity. For example, MCAT is not offered in the French language. Candidates from lower socioeconomic status groups or diverse groups may also find it challenging to pay for preparation classes for the tests. So, I think we have to look at other options. Medical schools are becoming more diverse.

LGO: Regarding the medical school you lead, Memorial University, is there anything exciting planned or ongoing you would like to share?

MS: I think the most exciting is our partnership with the University of Prince Edward Island. We are developing a medical school in partnership with Memorial University. It was announced in the news in the fall of 2021.

LGO: Thank you once again. You have lived a life of service. I wish you all the best in your leadership journey and the new medical school plans.

MS: Thank you. I tell my students that the most important thing is being passionate, making a difference in people’s lives and having fun while doing it.