

Excerpt from a talk by Dr. Garry Humphreys at the 130th celebration of the Public Health Service in Peterborough in February 2019.

Dr. Humphreys was the Medical Officer of Health in Peterborough for many years and a longtime member of the Peterborough Rotary Club.

Dr. Hugh Gastle graduated from Queen's University in Kingston in 1944 and immediately joined the Canadian army medical core. At the end of WWII, he began family practice in Lakefield, ON. When the other doctor in town died 4 months later, he was the only doctor in town. He initiated Well-Baby Clinics in town and served as the medical officer of health for the community.

In 1955, a Polio Epidemic was occurring in Lakefield involving young children. Dr. Gastle was aware that a vaccine had been developed and tested on humans by Connaught Laboratories Ltd. When he requested permission to have some of the vaccine released for use in stopping the Lakefield polio epidemic, he was rebuffed. He then approached the Ontario Ministry of Health officials in Toronto but was informed that the Federal Government had not yet released it for vaccination in Canada, but had no success. He then contacted his local member of parliament and with his assistance, explained to the Minister of Health the need for vaccination in his riding to stop this polio epidemic especially including young children. The Honourable Paul Martin was the Minister at that time. As a child, he had been ill with polio and suffered flaccid paralysis. The Minister contacted Connaught Laboratories Ltd, and they assured him that the vaccine had been tested and was safe and available immediately for immunization. The Prime Minister was consulted and permission was granted.

Dr. Gastle received the vaccine, the children were immunized and the epidemic of polio ceased.

The children vaccinated that year were the very first in Canada and the world to receive the Polio Salk Vaccine immunization.

When I arrived in Peterborough to take up my position as Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Gastle was the first doctor to welcome me to the community. Public health was his passion!

Submitted by:
Lucas Smith
Rotary Club of Peterborough