



John FitzGerald, MD PhD

In partnership with The University of Toronto, Dr. John FitzGerald founded the Connaught Laboratories in 1914, where he personally manufactured the first safe, effective, Canadian-made rabies vaccine and diphtheria anti-toxin. Connaught Laboratories would become a world leader in vaccine production and, by 1920, all provinces were distributing a full range of Connaught preventive medicines to the public for free.

John GERALD FitzGerald, “Canada’s Public Health Visionary”, was the eldest son of a pharmacist of Irish lineage. At age 16 he left home for the University of Toronto Medical School, graduating in 1903 as the youngest in his class.

While Dr. FitzGerald began his career in psychiatry and neuropathology, the successes of scientists such as Louis Pasteur fuelled a keen interest in bacteriology and the possibilities of preventive medicine.

FitzGerald’s studies at the Pasteur Institute in Paris and Brussels in 1910 and the University of Freiburg in 1911 shaped his public health vision for Canada. Appalled by the unchecked epidemics plaguing his native land, he returned home determined to build a public health policy based on a combination of research, education and production of universally available biomedical products.

In 1927, the University of Toronto created its School of Hygiene, the academic arm of the Connaught Laboratories and the first learning institution in Canada dedicated to public health and preventive medicine. Dr. FitzGerald was the first director. Together, the two institutions laid the foundation for provincial and federal health programs across Canada.

Dr. FitzGerald served as the Dean of the University of Toronto Medical School from 1932 until 1936 and was a Scientific Director of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1931 to 1934, the first Canadian to hold the position.

Dr. FitzGerald’s extraordinary drive, dedication and foresight effectively led to the control and eradication of many deadly infectious diseases afflicting the health of Canadians.