



Balfour Mount, MD

Medical technology has never been more powerful than it is today, but our progress in power would be incomplete without advances in humane care of patients as individuals who experience pain and suffering, and who must confront death and loss. Defining health care as “a relational process involving movement towards an experience of integrity and wholeness,” Dr. Balfour Mount has worked as physician, lecturer and author to ensure compassion has kept pace with power in our treatment of life-limiting and life-ending illnesses and disease. Credited with coining the term “palliative care,” Dr. Mount joins the ranks of such pioneers as Viktor Frankl, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and Dame Cicely Saunders in recognizing the need for humane and compassionate ‘whole-person’ care to alleviate suffering and enhance dignity for terminally ill patients and their families.

A medical graduate of Queen’s University, Dr. Mount worked as a urologist at McGill University, and as a surgical oncologist at New York’s Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and The Jackson Laboratory, Bar Harbor, Maine. A 1973 research study of patients with life-limiting illnesses at McGill’s Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH), and his own personal experiences as a cancer patient, intensified Dr. Mount’s interest in the needs of the terminally ill and their families. He travelled to the United Kingdom to learn firsthand about the hospice movement and eventually persuaded the leadership of the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University to open the first comprehensive Palliative Care Service at the Royal Victoria Hospital in 1975. He continued to serve there until 1990, and in 1999, began the McGill Programs in Whole Person Care.

Dr. Mount has travelled worldwide promoting and explaining palliative care, the pathophysiology of symptoms and their management, and the human experience of suffering endured by patients and families. Dr. Mount combined the rigours of scientific analysis with deep appreciation for individual human beings, a combination that helps to humanize the intellectual and procedural triumphs of modern medicine.

Professor Emeritus of Medicine at McGill University where he held the Eric M. Flanders Chair in Palliative Medicine, (1995 – 2006), Dr. Mount has received numerous awards, honorary degrees from leading Canadian universities, and is honoured by several awards established in his name. In 2010, McGill University Health Centre established the Balfour Mount Palliative Care Unit.

Dr. Mount is universally admired by his peers and is generally recognized as having achieved integration of palliative care as integral to effective and humane health care. Many others who may not know Dr. Mount or the great accomplishments of his long career are still touched by the work he has done, and future generations of patients and their families will experience dignity and compassion facing some of their greatest challenges because of his vision.