

VII.

The Way Forward

Profile of Dr. Michelle Elizov

- Dr. Michelle Elizov is on a mission to ensure that each and every one of McGill Medicine's 5000 faculty members has access to the training and mentorship opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

"When people are genuinely interested in your development, you feel it," reflects Dr. Michelle Elizov, Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Associate Professor of Medicine at the McGill Faculty of Medicine. "You feel it in the way that they pay attention to you and get to know you. You feel it in the questions they ask in order to help you reach the next step." Dr. Elizov has experienced the power of effective teaching and mentorship on the road to becoming the clinician, educator, and academic leader she is today, and she pours her time and energy into investing in the lives of countless others.

Discovering a passion

Drawn to the opportunity to solve diagnostic puzzles and impact the lives of patients at their most vulnerable, Dr. Elizov pursued internal medicine at the Jewish General Hospital after graduating from medical school at McGill. She never expected to pursue teaching in addition to her work as a clinician. "I'm the daughter of two public school teachers in Montreal," she explains. "I had witnessed the passion and joy they found in teaching but also all the budget cuts and struggles they faced. I told my parents that you couldn't pay me enough to teach. What I didn't realize at the time is that I was already heading down that path. They've certainly had the last laugh."

Like other residents, Dr. Elizov was constantly teaching and being taught in an informal capacity. When she



rose to become Chief Resident in Internal Medicine, she was required to conduct a teaching session for her fellow residents every week. To her parents' delight, she fell in love with the craft of teaching. She embarked upon a Masters in Health Professions Education and joined the McGill Faculty of Medicine as an Assistant Professor in 2000.

Her passion for medical education took flight after she accepted the invitation of Dr. Peter McLeod, a retired Internist at the Montreal General Hospital, to join a research project at the Centre for Medical Education, now the Institute of Health Sciences Education. "Clinicians are taught to be great clinicians, and researchers are taught to be great researchers, but even at a teaching institution, teachers are not necessarily taught to be great teachers," she recognized during her time on the project. "I was completely fascinated by this group of people who were committed to improving health professions education."

The role of a lifetime

After she was "bitten by the MedEd bug," Dr. Elizov didn't think twice about accepting an invitation to join the Faculty Development Committee at McGill. It was her first formal involvement in education at the Faculty level, and she quickly hit her stride. "I absolutely loved the process of supporting faculty members in their diverse roles," she remembers.

In helping her colleagues become more effective teachers and meet their career objectives, she drew upon the lessons

learned from some of the primary mentors in her professional life: Dr. Peter McLeod; Dr. Rubin Becker, the Director of Division of General Internal Medicine at the Jewish General Hospital; and Drs. Yvonne Steinert and Miriam Boillat, Dr. Elizov's predecessors in leading the Faculty Development Office. "I have been incredibly fortunate to work with these leaders and many others who believed in the growth of the people around them," she affirms. "They taught me the importance of being present in each encounter, be it with a patient, with a learner, or with a colleague, and asking the right questions."

In 2017, Dr. Elizov became the Assistant Dean of the Faculty Development Committee, an interdisciplinary team comprised of faculty members from across the schools of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. Together, the members of the committee develop and deliver workshops, presentations, and other educational activities to support the development of faculty members in their roles as teachers, researchers, and leaders. When focusing on the teaching aspect, the committee members present in hospitals and on campus to equip as many colleagues as they can to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Every session highlights the importance of teaching and provides practical guidance on topics ranging from providing constructive feedback to encouraging teamwork.

One of the most challenging aspects of Dr. Elizov's efforts is the recognition that faculty members have a number of interests competing for their time. In some cases, the faculty members who need support the most may not recognize it, or they may determine that other aspects of their work need to take priority. "None of the support we offer is mandatory, so many of the faculty members who attend are already somewhat in tune with their own teaching abilities and eager to improve," she explains. "In a sense, we're preaching to the converted. That being said, we will continue to work hard to expand our reach so that every faculty member knows about the free resources we offer."

After the outbreak of COVID-19, the Faculty Development Committee pivoted to developing workshops that provide a crash course in several timely topics: the basics of telehealth, teaching on Zoom, and supervising learners who provide virtual care. "As it was for everyone, the pandemic was a real blow to our scheduled activities," she remembers. "We had to become quasi-experts in these topics in a short period of time," she reflects. In the fall, Dr. Elizov and her team will release the first of seven blended learning modules, which feature both online and face-to-face components, to provide basic training in teaching to all faculty members. "Whether or not we go back to business as usual after the pandemic, we need to embrace online learning," she believes.

Peers helping peers

In addition to leading the Faculty Development Committee, Dr. Elizov serves as the Chair of the GIM Training Program Competence Committee and Vice-Chair of the Royal College GIM Specialty Committee. For a time, she also held the position of Director of University and Medical Education at CIUSSS Centre Ouest de l'Île de Montréal. She continues to spend several days a week providing clinical care at the Jewish General Hospital. With such a full plate of commitments, she acknowledges the ongoing difficulty of striking the right balance. From her perspective, finding a group of peer mentors is a crucial ingredient in finding that balance. "I have a close-knit group of friends and colleagues who act as a sort of advisory board," she shares. "We meet frequently to talk through all manner of topics, whether it's about tough clinical cases or the wisdom of accepting new leadership roles in addition to our current responsibilities."

In early 2021, Dr. Elizov will continue a collaboration with the Academic Affairs Office at McGill to run the third iteration of the Telemachus Scholars Program, a peer coaching and mentorship initiative that is designed to create the same community of support that she enjoys with her personal peer group. "I'm passionate about the possibility of peers supporting peers in a non-evaluative way," she expresses. "It can be as simple as asking a trusted colleague to watch your Zoom presentation and provide feedback. You don't have to be an expert to lend support. We need to destigmatize that process of exchanging feedback and reframe aspects of mentorship as coaching conversations. Everyone wants and needs to improve, and peer coaching and mentorship is the right way forward."

In more than two decades as a clinician, teacher, and academic leader, Dr. Elizov has encountered more accomplished professionals than she can remember. "The healthcare profession is full of people who are incredibly bright, but it's not enough to bring only intelligence to the table," she believes. "Especially in this unprecedented year for the health sciences community, it's vital to identify colleagues with kindness, empathy, and a willingness to invest in people so that we can help each other grow. When we do that, we can achieve anything."

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