



When Dr. Stephen Phillips did one of his first neurology internships back in the early 1980s in the U.K., he cared for a very disabled stroke patient. “I don’t want to see this person again,” his consulting doctor told Dr. Phillips after they visited the man’s bedside. There was nothing they could do for him.

Now, more than 40 years later, as Dr. Phillips retires, he is looking back at how much has changed.

Progress in treating stroke “has come on incredibly,” he says. “Stroke used to be known as the most neglected major disease.” Dr. Phillips helped change that over the 33 years he spent as a neurologist at Dalhousie University and Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax.

### **At the forefront of care**

He reflects on the progress in his 2021 Ramon J. Hnatyshyn Lecture in Stroke, titled “The Stroke Revolution: A Personal Perspective.” Dr. Phillips was selected by his peers to deliver the lecture Nov. 26 at the Ottawa Stroke Summit, in recognition of his many contributions as a leader and mentor.

“He was on the forefront of stroke care before stroke care became a thing,” says Dr. Patrice Lindsay, director of health systems at Heart & Stroke.

A key development in stroke care was the development of the clot-busting drug, tissue plasminogen activator or tPA. Early on, Dr. Phillips realized that tPA only helped some patients, so the approach to stroke care mattered too.

He advocated — nationally and in Atlantic Canada — for the adoption of coordinated multidisciplinary team care provided on dedicated stroke units. In 2002, he published a study showing the positive impact of this approach on patient outcomes at the QEII.

### **Evidence-based guidelines**

In 1999, Dr. Phillips helped found the Canadian Stroke Network, which worked with Heart & Stroke to develop the Canadian Stroke Strategy. That led to the first evidence-based guidelines on stroke care published in Canada. “We were able to come together and get good collaboration and consensus. And it just started building from there,” recalls Dr. Phillips.

While Dr. Phillips’ name is on several editions of what are now called the Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations, he’s also known in Halifax as a caring doctor — one with an artistic sensibility.

He is an avid photographer and many of his photos, printed on canvas, line the halls of the stroke unit at QEII.

“We get a lot of comments from patients and families,” says Dr. Phillips. “On the unit, the pictures on the wall are a soothing counterbalance to the chaos and misery around us.” Responding to demand, he began allowing sales of prints and calendars featuring his work. Proceeds help fund professional development for stroke unit staff.

As Dr. Phillips retires, his main goal is to “pass the torch” to the next generation of clinicians and researchers — many of whom he has mentored or trained. He knows there is more work to do to beat stroke.