Dr. Frank A. Turnbull, MD, FRCSC

CMA President, 1964-65
University of Toronto, 1928
Neurosurgery

Dr. Turnbull was a pioneering physician who became the first neurosurgeon to practise in Western Canada and the first and only neurosurgeon to serve as CMA president. In a CMA oral history transcript, he described the early days of neurosurgery this way: “It was considered such a far-out specialty and its results practically hopeless because in the mind of the average doctor it was equated with brain tumours, and it was taken for granted that all patients with brain tumours died.” He assumed the CMA presidency at a tumultuous time, because the long-awaited first volume of the Hall Royal Commission was released two days before the 1964 annual meeting. Years later, Dr. Turnbull would describe the report as “tremendous,” even if he had used other words to describe it back in 1964. “It was the shock of the sudden ex-cathedra pronouncement that this was the way it must be done that affected us at the time,” he told CMAJ.