

CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



CMA Awards Medal of Honour to Dr. Austin Mardon

OTTAWA, Aug. 16, 2011 /CNW/ - The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) will present the 2011 CMA Medal of Honour to Dr. Austin Mardon, PhD, who has demonstrated outstanding public commitment to raising awareness of mental health issues and diminishing the stigma and discrimination faced by Canadians living with mental illness.

"The CMA Medal of Honour recognizes personal contributions to the advance of medical research and education," said CMA President Dr. Jeff Turnbull. "Dr. Mardon has worked tirelessly to help Canadians better understand the issues around mental illness. In courageously talking openly about his own experiences, he is truly making a difference in coaxing mental illness out of the shadows in this country."

Diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of thirty, Dr. Mardon uses his own experience and his road to recovery in advocating in the areas of stigma, service delivery, awareness and education. He tries to improve the lives of those with schizophrenia through public education. His efforts have led him meet with politicians, clergy, academics and others in positions to effect change. He has influenced public policy in Alberta through his service as vice-chair of the Alberta Disabilities Forum steering committee and as chair of its low-income working group; as a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; as an addiction and mental health committee member of Alberta Health's service integration working group; and as chair of the Edmonton Champions' Centre advisory committee. He also was instrumental in winning changes to Alberta's income assistance program for the severely handicapped.

"I have put my experiences out there for all to see, but it hasn't been easy and for some people it's impossible," said Dr. Mardon. "My goal continues to be to see the unfair and debilitating stigma our society holds against the mentally ill wiped out for all time."

Austin Mardon, PhD, has been a public educator and tireless advocate for the mentally ill, particularly those with schizophrenia, since he was diagnosed with that illness in 1992. At the time he was a promising graduate student and Antarctic explorer, and the diagnosis of schizophrenia could have ended his academic career and severely limited his prospects in life. Instead, he survived many setbacks through his sheer determination to continue his studies, to make a difference, to contribute to society, and to help others.

Dr. Mardon graduated with a major in geography from the University of Lethbridge in 1985. The following year, at age 24, he was investigating meteorite impacts 170 km from the South Pole as a junior field member on an Antarctic meteorite recovery expedition sponsored by NASA and the National Science Federation. He received the U.S. Antarctic Service Medal for his work. However, the extreme hardships of the expedition affected him mentally and physically. While he went on to earn masters degrees in science (South Dakota State University) and education (Texas A&M University) and published a number of articles and books, his health issues persisted. At the age of 30 he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Although some of his abilities are compromised by the disease, he earned a PhD in geography from Greenwich University, Australia; continued his remarkable publication record, including articles in both *Science* and *Nature*; was elected an International Fellow and Corresponding Fellow of the Explorers Club of New York; and was inducted into the International Academy of Astronautics.

Equally impressive has been his work on behalf of the mentally ill. In addition to giving countless interviews to the media on the topic of mental illness, he has published articles about faith and schizophrenia, homelessness, medication, and income support. He has provided leadership as a member of the board of directors of both the Edmonton and Alberta chapters of the Schizophrenia Society, and for a number of years he was coordinator of the Alberta Mental Health Self-Help Network.

"I hope to soon see the day when schizophrenia is treated like any other disease and is finally detached from the stigma that makes a difficult burden to bear even worse," added Dr. Mardon.

Dr. Mardon has received a number of awards, including the Order of Canada (2007). Others include: the Flag of Hope Award (2001) and the Bill Jefferies Family Award (2007) of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada; the Distinguished Alumni Award of the University of Lethbridge (2002); the Presidents Award of the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association (2002); the C.M. Hincks Award from the national division of the Canadian Mental Health Association (2007); and the Medal of Honour of the Alberta Medical Association (2010).

A popular member of the Speakers' Bureau of Alberta, Dr. Mardon has publicly assisted the medical profession by supporting development of policy positions that have helped medical providers treat those with mental illness.

Dr. Mardon is the 28th recipient of the CMA Medal of Honour, the highest award bestowed upon someone who is not a member of the medical profession. He will receive the award at a ceremony at the D.F. Cook Recital Hall, Memorial University, in St. John's, N.L., on Aug. 24 as part of the CMA's 144th annual meeting.

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