

## HTRS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

### Q&A with Dr. Blanchette, FRCP, FRCP(C)

### 2019 HTRS Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient



**Dr. Victor S. Blanchette** is Medical Director of the Pediatric Thrombosis and Hemostasis Program in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Toronto, Canada. He is the McCaig Magee Family Medical Director of the SickKids-Caribbean Pediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Initiative in the Centre for Global Child Health at the Hospital for Sick Children. He is Director of the Pediatric Comprehensive Care Hemophilia Program at the Hospital for Sick Children, and Chair of the International Prophylaxis Study Group (IPSG). Further, he is a recipient of the Canadian Pediatric Society 2009 Alan Ross Award, the Canadian Blood Services 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award, and the American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology 2012 Distinguished Career Award. In 2017, Dr. Blanchette was awarded the Order of Barbados, the country of his birth, for his achievements in the field of pediatric medicine. Finally, he is an elected Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Blanchette and his wife, Yvonne, live in the Toronto area. They have four sons – Michael, Nicholas, Andrew and Phillip – along with six grandchildren that span in age from one to 10 years old. When asked how they enjoy their time, Dr. Blanchette says just being together is key, but they do enjoy beach time on the island of Barbados, where both Victor and Yvonne were born and where they often vacation with their family. Dr. Blanchette's research interests lie in the area of the congenital and acquired bleeding disorders of children.

## Q&A: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

### **Q: If you could bring one book to a desert island, what would it be?**

A: I like to read autobiographies of people who truly inspire me such as Nelson Mandela, who wrote an entire series about his life and philosophies. His country's history and culture were so much a part of his story and I can relate in that way. He grew up in South Africa when the British Empire was at its height. That's all changed now, as former British colonies such as Barbados (where I grew up) and South Africa are now independent although, when first colonized, their cultures revolved around

British-supported agriculture and African slaves. Though I didn't live through that history, that's where my roots are. Mandela experienced gross injustices firsthand – he started as a firebrand lawyer, was jailed for many years because of his beliefs, and went on to inspire and unite a nation. I am inspired by that.

**Q: Outside of medicine, what other interests or hobbies do you pursue?**

A: Sports and travel. I enjoyed tennis and running as a teenager and added squash when I moved to the United Kingdom for medical training at the University of Cambridge and St. Bartholomew's Hospital. All of our sons continue to share this enthusiasm for sports and travel. Some years ago I had the opportunity to attend the World Cup of soccer in Johannesburg, South Africa with one of my sons, a truly wonderful experience. We went on safari and visited where Nelson Mandela grew up and was imprisoned. I would say that all members of our family share a love of travel, adventure, and learning from friends of different backgrounds and cultures.

**Q: If you could invite anyone, living or dead, to dinner at your house, who would you invite?**

A: I would invite my wife Yvonne, my boyhood school friend Michael Stoute, the Queen of England, Nelson Mandela, Barack and Michelle Obama, and Masai Ujiri. We could have a very interesting conversation that ranged from the British Empire and the importance of the British Commonwealth, to flat horse racing (the queen is a lover of horseracing and Michael Stoute, now Sir Michael Stoute, is one of the most famous flat horse trainers in the world) to basketball (Barack Obama is a keen follower of basketball and Masai Ujiri is the current General Manager of the professional basketball team in Toronto who recently led the Toronto Raptors to their first NBA title). Ujiri is from Africa and is doing great philanthropic work targeted at youth on that continent. Yvonne is a strong Royalist and would be thrilled to be at dinner with Her Majesty the Queen. All in all, there would be no lack of things to share and talk about with a very diverse group somehow connected through history and sport. Everyone would be delighted to share the evening with Nelson Mandela.

**Q: A genie in a bottle gives you three wishes...what would you wish?**

A: I always wanted to experience the Triple Crown series of flat racing in the USA – the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes. My childhood friend from Barbados, now Sir Michael Stoute, started the ball rolling a few years back by getting tickets for my four sons and me to go to the Kentucky Derby. The Belmont Stakes in New York was next and just recently we completed the "bucket list" by going to The Preakness Stakes in Baltimore for my youngest son's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. These "three wishes" have given our family a great deal of joy and very special memories together.

**Q&A: YOUR CAREER**

**Q: Who are the mentors who first inspired you to choose non-malignant hematology as a career?**

A: I knew I always wanted to study medicine as a young person – I didn't know why or how, but I knew I would try. I am grateful to the headmaster at the school I attended in Barbados, who was very close to our family and had been educated at Cambridge University in England. He advised my parents, "Victor should go to Cambridge." My uncle was an academic lawyer in the U.K. at the time, had himself studied at Cambridge University, and that was it. During post-graduate training in London, I worked for a Consultant Hematologist, Dr. David Galton, at the Royal Marsden Hospital. He had a large leukemia practice and sparked my interest in hematology. I subsequently moved to the USA to pursue pediatric training at Johns Hopkins Hospital where I met Dr. Walter Zinkham, a fine and very kind pediatric hematologist. Dr. Zinkham knew Dr. Alvin Zipursky, whom at the time was Head of the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Program at McMaster University Health Sciences Center in Hamilton, Canada. This led to my move to Hamilton to work as a pediatric hematology/oncology fellow with Dr. Zipursky. Yvonne and I had married in 1969 and had four sons by the time I finished my pediatric hematology/oncology fellowship in Hamilton. With four young sons. Yvonne became the chief manager of the family to allow me to pursue my career in pediatric hematology/oncology in Canada, first in Ottawa and then in Toronto starting in 1983 when Dr. Zipursky, then Chief of the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Division at SickKids, recruited me to the Faculty in the Division and where I have worked ever since. I cannot thank Yvonne enough for her support over the years – being a mum is the most important job in a family but is often undervalued. I also owe a great deal of thanks to my parents who supported my dream to train in medicine and who instilled in me core values of caring and respect that have served me well, and to Dr. Zipursky, or "Zip," as we fondly call him, who has been my long-time academic mentor. "Zip" is a superb clinician scientist and a true legend in Canadian pediatric hematology/oncology, having trained many of the current leaders in the field in Canada. He inspired me by his love for his patients and their families and his insistence on striving for excellence in whatever task one is given or chooses.

### **Q: Do you have lessons to share from all these experiences?**

A: Absolutely. Young physicians are often focused on selecting a job based on how it will lead to the next best job. When I look back, my career path was more winding. I almost didn't take my first job in Canada because it was not an ideal fit for me, or so I thought at the time. However, when I look back, it taught me a lot and gave me exposure to laboratory aspects of platelet disorders. While the laboratory wasn't my biggest passion, this early experience ultimately led to a career focused on the inherited and acquired bleeding disorders in children. Young physicians sometimes get too concerned with finding the "perfect" job. My advice is to always train in good places and to seek out and value good mentors. Things will then generally work out well.

### **Q: A highlight of your career to date?**

A: It's very special to me when the people I have taught go on to do great things. HTRS member Leo Brandão is one of my "academic children" – I was fortunate to have the chance to recruit him to the Faculty at SickKids when I was Chief of the Division. Together with other Faculty members in the Division, we have trained nearly 40 fellows in pediatric thrombosis and hemostasis. Many of these trainees have become leaders in the field in their own countries around the world. They are not only academic colleagues but also friends. Giving back has been a very meaningful highlight of my career. I also treasure winning this Lifetime Achievement Award because some of my former fellows, including Drs. Leo Brandão and Riten Kumar nominated me.

Another highlight is my involvement with the SickKids-Caribbean Pediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders initiative within the Centre for Global Child Health, which was founded as a non-profit initiative in 2013 to include six Caribbean countries: the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. We are trying to close the gap in access to diagnosis, treatment and outcomes for children with cancer and serious blood disorders such as sickle cell anemia and hemophilia in these low- to middle-income countries as compared to resource-affluent countries such as Canada and the USA.

### **Describe why you are a member of HTRS and how you think the Society can continue to evolve.**

A: HTRS is meaningful to me because it is the future of our discipline – HTRS promotes the recruitment and retention of the next generation of pediatric hematologists such as Riten Kumar, one of my former trainees who recently reported on his research at the HTRS/NASTH 2019 Scientific Symposium. I was proud of Riten as I listened to his presentation and congratulate HTRS on its important contribution to encouraging and supporting young researchers in the field of pediatric thrombosis and hemostasis.

### **What words of guidance would you give trainees contemplating a career in non-malignant hematology?**

A: Find a good mentor or mentors...individuals who support you, yet stretch you to the far reaches of your potential and, importantly, inspire you by example. Let them know when you need help. Watch them in action and seek their advice when you need it. Develop relationships with colleagues you trust and admire and, over time, you will build a group of colleagues in your home countries and around the world who will inspire and support you throughout your career.