

## **In Memoriam: Dr. Dennis Richard Klassen**

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on behalf of

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Wed 8/19/2020 4:43 PM

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### **In Memoriam: Dr. Dennis Richard Klassen**

October 6, 1966 - July 29, 2020.

The family of Dr. Dennis Richard Klassen is deeply saddened to announce his passing on July 29th, in Winnipeg, Man., at the age of 53. He was predeceased by his loving maternal mother, Kathleen (Keough) Klassen; and his brother, Darrin Klassen.

Dennis was a son of Richard and Rhonda Klassen and has two remaining siblings, Terry Baldwin (partner Bill Sisson, children Kelsey and Kurt Baldwin) and Kim Klassen (partner Jirka Kubik). Along with the wonderful mother of his children, Dr. Lisl Mayer, Dennis was a loving father to Jakob and Leo. His final year of life was spent adventuring with partner Cynthia LeBlanc.

Dennis was raised in Sanford, Man., and moved with his family to St. Norbert, Man., where he completed his General Surgery training at the University of Manitoba in 1999, and then assumed a community General Surgery position in Guelph, Ont. He later completed a highly coveted fellowship in minimally invasive surgery at McGill University and in 2002 was recruited to Dalhousie as the first fellowship trained minimally invasive surgeon in Atlantic Canada.

Over the subsequent 18 years, Dennis had a major role in advancing minimally invasive surgery in the Maritimes. He believed in continuing education, always partaking in training to advance his skills and share with others. As such he was known for his plethora of information on any given topic, even beyond his medical profession, always knowing something about anything. He was an outstanding trainee educator and was recognized for his excellence in teaching of General Surgery residents, receiving the Silver Dever award five times throughout his 18-year career. He has been the Program Director for the General Surgery Resident Training Program, as well as the undergraduate Clerkship coordinator for General Surgery. He was instrumental in the initiation of the Dalhousie Minimally Invasive Surgery Fellowship Program in 2008, and has been a cornerstone in that program over the subsequent 12 years. As such, he has had a major impact on the training of 13 high quality minimally invasive surgeons.

Dennis was incredibly humble and travelled throughout the Maritimes teaching and mentoring in specific minimally invasive surgery cases in a non-threatening and collegial fashion. He was all about the work, nothing about the recognition. In serving as a reliable and effective hands-on surgical mentor in the learning curve of many Maritime surgeons, he had a profound impact on the safe implementation of new technology to the betterment of patients. This has likely been the single most important element in driving the widespread and thoughtful adoption of many minimally invasive operations throughout the Maritimes. Dennis won the Wayne Putnam award for outstanding contributions to the continuing education of Maritime physicians. His teaching style was best described as kind, calm and understated.

Many colleagues contributed to the Youtube channel, "Dalhousie Minimally Invasive Surgery", giving accolades and testament to Dr. Klassen's excellence in his field and as a caring, patient and admirable individual. Dennis will be deeply missed and always loved, impacting many people's lives from around the world. And although regarded as an outstanding clinician and teacher, Dennis was perhaps best-known for his collegial, supportive and kind approach to his work. Thus, the annual Dr. Dennis Klassen Award is being established to recognize a physician within the Division of General Surgery (staff surgeon, fellow or resident) at Dalhousie University/QEII Health Sciences Centre, who best displays the characteristics of professional kindness.

Due to community gathering restrictions at this time, a funeral will be organized in the future when constraints are lifted and it is safe for people to convene. In lieu of flowers, a fund is being established to honor Dr. Klassen's contributions to General Surgery in Canada through the Canadian Association of General Surgeons, and will be used to advance and promote the types of skills and training he spent his career learning and teaching. Donations can be made "in honour of Dr. Dennis Klassen" to the Canadian Association of General Surgeons at <https://cags-accg.ca/donate/>. The family would like to thank the staff at St. Boniface Hospital for their exceptional care. Chapel Lawn Funeral Home. 204-885-9715