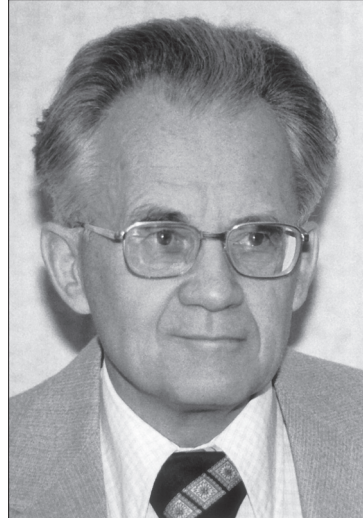


DR. OTTO SCHAEFER

It is with great sadness that we learn of the death of Dr. Otto Schaefer. Many readers of this journal have fond memories of Dr. Schaefer, who could be considered one of the founders of the “circumpolar health movement”. He was instrumental in the formation of the Canadian Society and the International Union for Circumpolar Health.



Dr. Schaefer, born in Germany on October 2, 1919, died peacefully at his home in Jasper, Alberta, on Nov. 2, 2009, at the age of 90. He graduated in medicine from the University of Heidelberg but immigrated to Canada in 1951 to realize his dream of working with the Inuit in Canada’s Arctic. He gave 32 years of his life to providing medical care for the Inuit, learning their language, traveling by dog team, and researching health and nutrition issues in the north. From 1964 until his retirement in 1985, he was the founding director of the Northern Medical Research Unit of Department of National Health and Welfare of Canada, based in Edmonton. He received many honours for his achievements, including the Order of Canada in 1976.

Dr. Schaefer’s research interests were wide-ranging, including infectious diseases, cancer, diabetes, nutrition, and respiratory diseases. He subscribed to a broad view of health, and long championed the importance of socio-cultural factors in shaping the health of Northern communities undergoing rapid changes. He belonged to the “old school” of field research, before the advent of laptop computers, statistical software and fancy graphics, an arctic version of shoe-leather epidemiology. He epitomized the kind of researchers who knew how to ask the right questions and generate interesting hypotheses rather than follow well-worn paths in tackling pedestrian issues with increasing methodological rigour. He inspired a whole generation of researchers in circumpolar health.

Dr. Schaefer probably attended his last circumpolar health congress in the late 1990s, and thus may not be familiar to the new generation of circumpolar health researchers and practitioners. Those among us who knew him, respected him, and loved him, will miss the kind, gentle man with the charming German accent.

Kue Young
Professor