



## HNATYSHYN STROKE LECTURE 2026 ANNOUNCEMENT

**Mike Sharma, MD, MSc, FRCPC**



Dr. Mike Sharma has been named the 2026 Hnatyshyn Lecturer in recognition of his profound impact on stroke care in Canada and internationally. A professor of neurology at McMaster University and a leading clinician-scientist, Dr. Sharma has dedicated his career to advancing stroke prevention, treatment, and systems of care, authoring more than 170 peer-reviewed publications and leading major international clinical trials, including OCEANIC-STROKE. His work has helped reshape stroke prevention through more targeted, safer therapies and has influenced national and global stroke guidelines. In May 2026, he will share his career journey and the latest advances in stroke science when he delivers the Hnatyshyn Lecture at the Canadian Stroke Congress.

The Hnatyshyn Lecture was established in 2003 in memory of Canada's 24<sup>th</sup> Governor General, a founding board member of the Canadian Stroke Network and a strong advocate and supporter of stroke research.

The Hnatyshyn and Nieboer Lectures will be a feature event in conjunction with the Canadian Stroke Congress, which will be held May 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026 in Banff, Alberta.

Learn more about Dr. Sharma below.

And join us at Stroke Congress in May! <https://strokecongress.canadianstroke.ca/>

## Curiosity drives doctor-researcher, nudges stroke care forward

### *Clinician-scientist Dr. Mike Sharma leads with his passion for science*

Dr. Mike Sharma assumed he'd become a physicist, majoring in the subject as an undergraduate at Dalhousie University. "I looked around at my professors and thought, 'You know, it's a bit of a lonely pursuit, isolated from most of humanity.'" He applied to medical school, reasoning he could do graduate school in physics as a back-up.

"That was almost forty years ago now, and I haven't looked back," says Dr. Sharma, who says his younger self would never believe he'd be where he is now — professor of medicine in neurology at McMaster University, and in the view of his peers, one of the leading and hardest working stroke clinician-scientists in Canada. His contributions have had what others call a "profound" impact on stroke care in Canada and around the globe, too.

"The one thing I've always had is curiosity. Everything I studied seemed interesting at the time," says Dr. Sharma, who is also director of the Brain Health and Stroke Research Program of the Population Health Research Institute, the Michael G. Degroote Chair in Stroke Prevention and medical director of the Central South Regional Stroke Network. "The path that's led me on is not the one I would have picked, nor the one that seemed the laid out at the beginning."

At first, in medicine, he thought he'd become a neurosurgeon, and then a neurologist, but with expertise in testing via electromyography or electroencephalography. But during his neurology residency at Western University, he had a chance meeting with a young stroke doctor and scientist in an elevator.

That turned into a professional friendship that led to a research fellowship and a career-spanning interest in stroke. Dr. Sharma treats patients, runs clinical trials — he's been part of some of the most groundbreaking in stroke over the last few decades — and develops and fine-tunes local and national systems to support care, research and knowledge-sharing.

This coming May, he expects to share some of this story and his thoughts on the latest stroke science when he presents the 2026 Hnatyshyn Lecture at the Canadian Stroke Congress.

As a researcher, Dr. Sharma has made myriad contributions. He has authored more than 170 peer-reviewed publications and secured more than \$21.5 million in research funding.

His earliest research looked at excitotoxic transmitters and in their role in injuring neurons. "We've cured stroke in rats hundreds of times." And while that line of research failed in humans, he now wonders if new developments might help that work come back to life.

Over the years his research has spanned topics such as predicting who is most likely to have a stroke to the economic burden of stroke. In recent years, his focus has been prevention among people who are either at risk of having a first stroke, or the one-in-five stroke survivors who will have another within five years.

Taking aspirin has been the gold standard in stroke prevention for decades, but he's been on the hunt for a more targeted and nuanced approach. He is the principal investigator of the large, international OCEANIC-STROKE trial. The findings have been coming out in 2026, showing that using a medication that inhibits Factor XI, a blood coagulating protein, along with aspirin, can prevent strokes with minimal bleeding risk.

"Our treatment uses more than one drug at doses that work well in combination. It's better tolerated, more effective and there's lower risk of bleeding. But it took us awhile to get there," says Dr. Sharma.

He says it was one of his team's innovations to use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to detect covert strokes in determining a safe and effective dose of the new medication.

"Determining doses for use in stroke patients were an idea whose time had come," he said of this approach, which he says not everyone thought was a good idea at first.

Early on, Dr. Sharma recognized that having effective options for treatment, rehabilitation and prevention will not impact patient care without organized systems. "The clinical organization side is very interesting. We had to develop stroke systems to optimize care," he says of the early days of stroke care at the start of his career.

Over the years, he has devoted considerable effort to getting systems in place. He was chair of the board of the Canadian Stroke Consortium for eight years, has taken on leadership roles at major scientific meetings such as the Canadian Stroke Congress and World Stroke Congress. He's helped develop numerous stroke guidelines, including the Canadian Stroke Best Practices Recommendations.

Dr. Sharma balances these efforts with time spent treating patients and working with residents and fellows. "It is an invigorating, exciting process," he says of teaching and mentorship. "It makes you optimistic about the future when you meet all these keen, young people who are going to do great things."

Up next, Dr. Sharma will continue to research how dual pathway therapies — combining aspirin with other drugs, for instance — can best prevent strokes, plus he will work on healthcare systems to make sure patients get access. Both tasks, for him, are fascinating.

"There was a time when you finished a trial, published a paper and went on to something else," he says. "The other part of it is implementation. You need to work to get successful treatments into the hands of people who can benefit."