



Dr. Jennifer Fraser named inaugural Roper-Hannah Chair in the History of Healthcare and Health Equity at King's and Dalhousie

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The University of King's College and Dalhousie University have appointed Dr. Jennifer Fraser to a new chair in the medical humanities: the Roper-Hannah Chair in the History of Healthcare and Health Equity. This tenure-track position is dedicated to research and teaching at the intersection of the history of medicine, bioethics and health equity.

Dr. Fraser is a historian whose research examines the impact of colonialism on global modern healthcare, with a particular focus on the historical roots of health inequalities in cancer and women's health.

"We tend to treat epidemiological facts as neutral, but many of the ideas and methods of epidemiology are rooted in long histories of colonialism that persist today," says Dr. Fraser. "The goal isn't just to bring this history to light—it's to ask what we carry forward unexamined."

"I want students to develop a deeper understanding of the complex histories and power dynamics that shape contemporary health systems," says Dr. Fraser, adding that the skills students take from studying the history of health inequalities extend well beyond academia. "It applies whether you become a doctor, a nurse, a health policy professional or someone building an AI tool for healthcare. My goal is to show students this history isn't confined to the past—it's a flexible skill set that travels into almost any health-related career."

As of January 2027, Dr. Fraser will hold a joint appointment to [King's History of Science and Technology \(HOST\) program](#) and Dalhousie's [Department of History](#) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. She will be cross appointed to Dalhousie's [Faculty of Medicine](#) in the Department of Bioethics. This appointment will build on King's and Dalhousie's [Certificate in Medical Humanities](#).

"Jennifer's research speaks directly to some of our most pressing health challenges, from the enduring effects of colonialism on Indigenous health, to persistent inequities in women's healthcare," says [Dr. Mélanie Frappier](#), Director of the HOST honours program at King's. "Her work addresses issues that are deeply important in Nova Scotia while also contributing to global conversations about health equity. Her ability to work across disciplines will strengthen collaboration among the humanities, social sciences, medicine and public health at King's and Dalhousie. Equally important is her commitment to working

with communities beyond the university. Jennifer has a remarkable ability to build meaningful partnerships and to ensure that research reaches the people it is intended to serve.”

“The creation of this Chair and the hiring of Dr. Fraser is incredibly exciting for our faculty and Dalhousie. We are thrilled to be partnering with King’s and look forward to seeing how Dr. Fraser’s work will contribute to the community, locally, provincially, nationally and internationally,” says [Dr. Jennifer Andrews](#), Dean of FASS at Dalhousie.

About the Roper-Hannah Chair in the History of Healthcare and Health Equity

Using the indispensable tools of critical historical analysis, the appointed chair will conduct, promote and disseminate research at the intersection of the history of medicine/healthcare, medical and bioethics, and health equity. Scholarly touchpoints of the chair may include complicity of medical systems in colonial structures; health equity framing in the healthcare system; critical global history of science, before, during and after the colonial period; medicine and healthcare beyond Eurocentric understandings and borders; critical interrogation of a still largely Eurocentric understanding of bioethics and their value propositions around health and well-being.

The [announcement of this chair](#) was made last March at the capstone celebration marking 100 years of the association between King’s and Dalhousie. It was created through a \$3.5-million endowment—\$1.75 million each from AMS Healthcare and the J & W Murphy Foundation.

This is the first Hannah Chair established in Atlantic Canada, joining eight other [Hannah Chairs](#) at universities across the country. This national community of scholars advancing a robust understanding of how medical and bioethics change over time has been supported by AMS Healthcare since the 1970s.

“The Hannah Chairs have played an extraordinary role in advancing the study of healthcare history in Canada. Establishing the inaugural Roper-Hannah Chair at King’s and Dalhousie extends that legacy to Atlantic Canada, bringing an important and unique regional health equity perspective to understanding our past and shaping the future of healthcare. We are delighted to welcome Dr. Fraser into the Hannah Chair community,” says [Helen Angus](#), CEO at AMS Healthcare.

The J & W Murphy Foundation, led by sisters Lisa Murphy and Karen Spaulding, helped fund the chair as part of their ongoing commitment to supporting healthy communities through compassionate healthcare. They named the chair in honour of their mother, Janet Roper Murphy, the Roper family’s longtime Halifax roots, and their cousin Henry Roper’s lifelong dedication to history and King’s. “Dr. Fraser is a wonderful choice,” says Murphy. We wanted the Roper-Hannah Chair to be someone whose historical research will not collect dust and whose work would impact practice and policy today.”

About Dr. Jennifer Fraser’s Work and Research

Originally from Whitchurch-Stouffville, Ont., Dr. Fraser joins King’s and Dalhousie from King’s College London, where she most recently served as a Research Associate with the [Cartographies of Cancer](#) project in the Department of Global Health & Social Medicine.

Fraser’s scholarship traces how the tools and assumptions of modern epidemiology—particularly in the study of noncommunicable diseases such as cancer and nausea and vomiting during pregnancy—carry histories rooted in colonialism that continue to shape health policy today. In a recent *Medical History* article, she examines how colonial-era medical assumptions went on to influence the trajectory of global cancer research for decades.

“There has long been a tendency to portray Indigenous and African populations as somehow naturally susceptible to, or protected from, certain cancer types, like breast cancer,” says Fraser. “These ideas, which are embedded in broader structures of colonial harm, have real policy consequences, revealing how even the most celebrated epidemiological breakthroughs can carry complex legacies, often rooted in histories of colonialism, exploitation and inequity.”

Fraser’s path into the field began not in a history classroom, but in public health. After completing her BA(Hons) in history and psychology, she took a position as a policy analyst with the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, work that involved public and patient engagement as well as report writing.

Community engagement remains central to Fraser’s approach to research. “There’s real power in making sure what we produce as researchers actually reaches practice, and that we’re listening to the communities the research relates to,” she said. “Scholarship is at its best when it is collaborative, and real dialogue with the people you’re writing about adds a richness and depth that can’t be achieved any other way.”

About AMS Healthcare

AMS Healthcare is a Canadian charitable organization that was created 85 years ago to catalyze change in healthcare. We invest in people, developing leaders and scholars with the knowledge, skills and relationships to improve healthcare. We build community, connecting and convening people across disciplines around Compassion and AI and the History of Healthcare. We influence systems. Together they generate new knowledge, shape policy and practice, and inspire innovations that create more compassionate, equitable and sustainable health systems.

ams-inc.on.ca/

About the J & W Murphy Foundation

Started in 2008 by Bill & Janet Murphy of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, the J & W Murphy Foundation takes a broad and inclusive view of what a healthy community is, providing grants to a wide range of charitable organizations, mainly in Nova Scotia, including the following areas of particular interest: access to education for youth and adults; arts and culture; crisis services; food & housing insecurity; marginalized and under-addressed communities; compassionate healthcare and better outcomes; mental health and palliative and end-of-life care.

About Dalhousie University

Dalhousie University is Atlantic Canada’s leading research-intensive university, a key driver of the region’s intellectual, social and economic development for over 200 years. Located in the heart of Halifax—in the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq—with an Agricultural Campus in Truro/Bible Hill, Dalhousie is a truly national and international university, with more than half of our 20,000 students coming from outside of the province. Our 6,000 faculty and staff foster a diverse, purpose-driven community, one that spans 13 faculties and conducts more than \$194 million in sponsored research annually. dal.ca

About the University of King’s College

Established in 1789, King’s College is Canada’s oldest chartered university and is associated with Dalhousie University. A small and extraordinarily lively academic community located in Halifax (Kjipuktuk), Nova Scotia, King’s is known nationally and internationally for its highly acclaimed interdisciplinary programs in the humanities, Foundation Year Program, professional programs in journalism and fine arts programs in creative writing. ukings.ca

For more information contact:

Karen Eull, Associate Director, Communications, University of King's College

karen.eull@ukings.ca | 902.943.0409

Michael Fleury, Senior Manager, Strategic Communications & Media Relations, Dalhousie University

mjcfleur@dal.ca