I attended my first AADMD conference in 2016 in Chicago. I made sure to introduce myself to Dr. Cheetham as he was one of the only other Canadians in the room. He immediately made me feel welcome and important. He saw my enthusiasm and shared with me his obvious passion and humility. He introduced me to many of his colleagues as if he’d known me for much longer than only 10 minutes. It was this heartfelt welcome from a fellow Canadian that inspired me to become actively involved with the AADMD.

When Dr. Cheetham was a young undergraduate student in Ontario several years ago, he and his wife opened their home to 10 adults with developmental disabilities. Upon entering medical school, he was appalled by the attitudes toward people with disabilities within the medical profession.

He spent almost 30 years as a family doctor in Ontario, spending much of his time serving those with developmental disabilities. He later became the medical director at Orange Grove Centre in Chattanooga, Tennessee, then returned to Toronto to help develop the original Canadian Consensus Guidelines for Primary Care for Adults with Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Cheetham adapted the guidelines and the IDD Toolkit for use within the U.S.
healthcare system. The last several years of his career was spent serving as the Deputy Commissioner of Health Services for the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for the state of Tennessee. In 2017, he was awarded the Surgeon General’s Spirit Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service.

Dr. Tom Cheetham dedicated his life to improving the care and quality of life for people of all ages with developmental disabilities. He made it possible for passionate healthcare providers across North America to connect and learn together from one another’s mistakes and successes, rather than working in silos toward the same goals.

I am so grateful to have met Dr. Cheetham and am honoured to have received his encouragement as I begin my career. The world is a better place because of him.

Dr. Cheetham passed away on Monday, August 20. He will be greatly missed.

Meet the New VGR chairs
Shannon Strader:

Shannon attends Lincoln Memorial University-DeBusk College of Osteopathic Medicine. She is in her third year, and loves stem cell research. Shannon would love to be a pediatric physiatrist in the future.
Lauren Clarke:

Hello! My name is Lauren Clarke and I am currently getting my BS in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and my Master of Health Administration from USC. I have worked for Special Olympics for over five years and have spent three summers working at the Lee Specialty Clinic and am very excited to get more involved with the AADMD on keeping the VGR program alive. Please contact me if you have any presenters in mind at leclarke@usc.edu. Looking forward to working with you all!
AADMD National Meeting
Thank you to everyone who made the national meeting and the Institute a success this year. Look for information coming soon about the meeting next year in New York.