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SPECIAL ISSUE
The First Canadian-Mexican Rheumatology Congress,
February 17-21, 2006, Acapulco, Mexico

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The mission of the CRAJ is to encourage discourse among the Canadian Rheumatology community for the exchange of opinions and information.

The editorial board has complete independence in reviewing the articles appearing in this publication and is responsible for their accuracy. The advertisers exert no influence on the selection or the content of material published.
This issue of the *CRAJ* will document, archive and celebrate the very successful collaborative meeting between the *Colegio Mexicano de Reumatología* (CMR) and the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA). The suggestion of a warm-weather meeting for the CRA was raised during the first CRA executive retreat in 1998. It is no surprise that the desire for a tropical meeting came during our sessions in frosty Winnipeg. The idea percolated through several presidential administrations. Ultimately, this meeting became a reality due to the focus of several years of very hard work by Arthur Bookman and Michel Zummer. Few individuals would put up with the hardship of visiting multiple resorts and getting sunburned, all for the cause of Canadian rheumatology. Their stories follow in this issue (pages 4, 5).

Hurricane Wilma nearly brought an end to this improbable meeting. However, the desire on the parts of both the CMR and the CRA to proceed with this unique event was more forceful than the weather. Last-minute arrangements to move the meeting from Cancun to Acapulco were close to miraculous. It should be stated for the record that the change in location was not without its casualties. A number of Canadian rheumatologists were inconvenienced because of unsympathetic airline booking policies which did not allow them to cancel their travel to Cancun without prohibitive penalty. It is unfortunate that the whole Canadian contingent could not attend because of this.

Those who did make it to Acapulco were rewarded with a wonderful facility for the meetings. Our hosts from the CMR were gracious and welcoming. The scientific content of the meeting was superlative (pages 6 and 8). Our new CRA president, Gunnar Kraag and vice-president John Thomson took office at the annual general meeting (page 7). The soccer match (page 9) was a personal highlight and the Canadian squad acquitted itself well in the heat and humidity. The social functions were unique and grand and will be remembered for a long time (pages 11 and 14). At the end of the meeting, the talk was not about if the Canadians and Mexicans should do this again but, rather, when.

If you did not have the opportunity to attend this singular event, hopefully this issue will in word and picture bring you some of the flavour of this gathering. *Gracias* to our great hosts from the CMR!

– Glen T.D. Thomson, MD, FRCPC

Editor-in-chief, *CRAJ*
Approximately three and a half years ago, a needs assessment indicated that the membership of the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) was interested in holding their annual general meeting in a unique location combined with another national organization. Given this mandate, our executive turned its attention towards Mexico, whose rheumatologists share many of our objectives. A full year elapsed before we were able to set up lines of communication with the Colegio Mexicano de Reumatología (CMR) through Dr. Carlos Pineda, vice-president of the CMR at that time. Immediately, a very friendly and collaborative relationship ensued between the executives of the CMR and CRA. In an impassioned presentation, Dr. Arthur Bookman described the CRA to the membership of the CMR at their annual congress in Guadalajara. Later that evening, we were thrilled to learn that they had voted to hold a combined meeting with the CRA in February 2006. And so, the process began. Several working sessions were held at the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) meetings, as well as the annual meetings of our two organizations.

The theme of the 2006 conference was determined, “Opportunity for Interaction.” We quickly realized that the combined meeting would not look at all like either of our annual meetings, each being extremely different. Together we agreed to showcase the expertise of each organization and include only speakers from both groups, with simultaneous English and Spanish translations. We identified areas of common interest and this became the framework for the meeting.

A seaside setting would be perfect and we sought a venue which could accommodate at least 800 attendees and their families without holding sessions in a congress center. The Cancun Hilton and Gran Melia were selected since costs were reasonable and travel manageable. We were very encouraged when 75% of our membership indicated that they would attend. Our way was cleared by Rx & D and we were very appreciative that our sponsors maintained their support of our annual meeting. We were set to go, as many logistics issues were settled and the joint organizing and scientific committees established a superb program.

However, in September 2005, Hurricane Wilma hit Cancun. We were saddened by the destruction and the impact on the lives of many Mexicans. With both our hotels seriously damaged, the possible repercussions of our own situation were of much concern. Luckily, Destinos in Mexico was able to save the meeting by reserving sufficient accommodation in Acapulco at a beautiful resort, the Fairmont Acapulco Princess. We made the final decision to move the meeting to Acapulco in mid-November during the ACR and had just three months to reorganize the event and reconfirm participation. Our gratitude goes to all our members who made a special effort to participate, given the additional costs and travel delays and complications.

The first annual Canadian-Mexican Congress was very exciting and stimulating. It fostered positive interaction on a professional and personal level. We owe the success of this meeting to the wonderful combined CRA-CMR scientific and organizing committees, in particular Carlos Pineda, Manuel Lanvin, Francisco Rosas, Gabriel Medrano, Arthur Bookman, Janet Pope and John Thomson.
After much planning, the opening ceremonies of the first Mexican-Canadian Congress of Rheumatology occurred on the evening of February 17, 2006. Two diverse groups representing the specialty of rheumatology from very different countries assembled in the same room for the first time. This was the first experience where these two groups, with different languages and backgrounds, would meet, don headsets, and listen to interpreters who would shine light into the diversity of their cultures, only to reveal common human thoughts and concepts. From the beginning, it was evident that respect and mutual admiration filled the room.

Dr. Gabriel Medrano Ramirez acted as master of ceremonies.

Dr. Francisco A. Rosas, the president of the Colegio Mexicano de Reumatología (CMR) was the first to offer words of welcome. He expressed his pride in the Mexican College, and his enthusiasm for this first annual Canadian-Mexican congress. He welcomed the Canadians and declared his pleasure in having met Dr. Michel Zummer and the Canadian planning committee members.

Dr. Zummer, representing the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) as its president, said that he had tremendously enjoyed the experience of working with Dr. Rosas and becoming close with the executive of the CMR and its scientific committee.

According to agreed-upon protocol, Dr. Leonor A. Barile Fabris, the incoming president of the CMR, presented diplomas from the CMR to all those successful candidates who were graduating as certified specialists in Mexico. Awards were then presented to the authors of the best Mexican papers in Clinical and Basic Science.

Dr. Janet Pope handed out awards to the winners for the best Canadian abstracts. The CMR then proudly introduced the recipient of its Masters award and, in turn, the CRA presented its award winners. Distinguished Investigator Dr. Jean-Luc Senécal was introduced by Dr. Jamie Henderson. Distinguished Rheumatologist Dr. Ian Tsang was introduced by Dr. Gunnar Kraag. Finally, Dr. Rubén Burgos-Vargas was introduced by Dr. Arthur Bookman as the Dunlop-Dotteridge awardee.

The ceremony concluded with the musical renditions of an excellent flutist.

The CRA Annual Dinner, held on February 20 in a delightful restaurant overlooking Acapulco Bay, was also the creation of the illustrious Dr. Zummer. We heard some words of wisdom from Dr. Tsang and from Dr. Senécal. Awards were presented. Dr. Bookman had his chance to present a cappuccino machine to Dr. Zummer who then spoke to the membership. He said that being the president of the CRA was one of the highlights of his life, and he thanked his lovely wife, Sandra, for her patience. He was particularly looking forward to not taking his computer to bed with him at night.

The festivities ended with the renditions of a Mariachi band.

I was asked to comment on the closing ceremonies. I do not remember any closing ceremonies. All I remember was a blurry evening by the sea, with dancing lymphocytes being attacked by monoclonal antibodies in costume. I remember a bobbing balloon over the ocean labelled with a Mexican biologic, and the name of the drug splashed in floodlights on the outside wall of the Acapulco Princess hotel. I remember the unending hot music evoking pelvic tilts from usually staid rheumatologists and bursts of fireworks and flaming rockets, culminating with the wide-eyed gasp of Allan Kagal, my former resident, “DR. BOOKMAN, what was THAT??!”
The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) joint meeting with the Colegio Mexicano de Reumatología (CMR) was the first of a series of joint meetings we hope to have and was extremely successful. The symposia highlighted invited speakers (Mexican and Canadian) on excellent topics of mutual interest. It was impossible to attend all of them as the sessions ran concurrently.

The symposia covered a wide range of topics, including fibromyalgia, systemic lupus erythematosus, antiphospholipid antibody syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis advances, new therapies, ankylosing spondylitis, epidemiology, access to care, connective tissue disease, vasculitis, pediatric outcome measurements, and osteoporosis.

In the vasculitis session, there was basic pathophysiology and epidemiology presented by Dr. Reyes on Takayasu’s arteritis. Insights into microscopic polyarteritis nodosa (PAN) were given by Dr. Flores. Dr. Yeung gave an excellent update on the pathogenesis of Kawasaki disease, including the fact that this could be a major risk factor for coronary artery disease, especially in some Asian populations. She suggested that, although markers of inflammation (e.g., tumor necrosis factor [TNF]) are not very predictable of disease activity, anti-TNF treatment might actually, at least at a basic science level, have a role in suppressing the disease for those who go on to chronic coronary arteritis.

Dr. Carette discussed the treatment of Wegener’s granulomatosis, mentioning: 1) if you obtain remission with cyclophosphamide, switch to a less toxic choice to maintain remission; 2) use steroids appropriately; and 3) the controversy of the role of antineutrophil cytoplasm antibodies (ANCA) in following for disease flare. He stated that if the ANCA increased, but the patient seemed well in the other parameters of disease flare, he would follow him/her more carefully, not necessarily intervening with more immunosuppressive drugs. Dr. Carette was one of the highly rated speakers of the meeting.

Another session primarily concentrated on Sjogren’s syndrome. Dr. Arthur Bookman presented data from the Sjogren’s clinic that is run at the UH with a multi-disciplinary and multi-specialty approach. It seems that fatigue and symptomatology are rated very high in Sjogren’s patients and they can be frustrated when it takes a long time for physicians to diagnose them and to acknowledge the severity of their symptoms. There may possibly be higher scores of hypochondriasis in these patients. Two basic science talks were presented on the pathophysiology of Sjogren’s syndrome. Dr. Pope presented insights into Raynaud’s phenomenon, including the often positive family history of idiopathic Raynaud’s in patients with Raynaud’s associated with connective tissue diseases. Longitudinal studies are showing that the presence of strongly positive antinuclear antibody levels and/or dilated periungual capillaries are strong risk factors for the...
development of connective tissue disease over time. Sildenafil has two positive randomized trials in severe Raynaud's. Sildenafil may also help to heal digital ulcers.

There are now two randomized controlled trials of bosentan in scleroderma-associated digital ulcers where there is no advantage in time to healing the ulcer. In those with multiple ulcers, there appears to be prevention of new ulcers with a 30%-50% reduction in new ulcers.

Dr. Earl Silverman presented data on neonatal lupus from anti-Ro positive mothers and the incidence may be decreasing over time. It is well known that most women who are anti-Ro positive will not have children with congenital heart block or neonatal lupus. Neonatal lupus, of course, occurs from the transfer of maternal antibodies so, in general, it is self-limited as the maternal antibodies eventually disappear. Dr. Stephanie Ensworth discussed issues in maternal and fetal lupus.

There was an excellent symposium, really from bench to bedside, of ankylosing spondylitis. Dr. Burgos-Vargas received the Dunlop-Dotteridge award from the CRA. Outcome measurements, including radiographic, in spondyloarthopathies were discussed.

These are some of the highlights of the sessions. My only regret was that it was impossible to get to all of them!
This year another record number of abstracts were submitted to the combined Canadian-Mexican meeting, with over 100 abstracts reviewed. The combined format of the meeting between the two rheumatology associations resulted in some differences in presentation format: the top 12 abstracts from each association were chosen for plenary presentation and 24 abstracts from each association were chosen for the next “tier” of simultaneous podium presentation. A few poster discussion groups were also added to the poster viewing sessions. Evaluations would suggest that registrants were pleased with the presentation format. I expect that some of the changes seen this year will be incorporated into future meetings. Thank you again to my fellow reviewers on the Abstract Selection Committee: Dr. Ken Blocka, Dr. Jack Karsh and Dr. Dianne Mosher. Congratulations to the successful authors and presenters.
On February 18, 2006, a mix of 26 members of the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA), their progeny and others took to the field at the Simon Bolivar School in Acapulco, Mexico. Assuming the moniker “CRA JointBusters,” the team, brimming with confidence instilled after an inaugural practice the day before, took on the heavily favoured home team, the Colegio Mexicano de Reumatologia (CMR) “Aravas,” a name we assumed referred to Mayan heritage.

The CMR spared no expense in ensuring adequate security, with armed guards posted at the admission gate, in case of a Canadian victory. Excellent field conditions were also ensured by a pre-game field preparation, provided by dedicated grounds staff.

Coached and managed by the ubiquitous duo of Michel Zummer and Carter Thorne, and with acclaimed Captains Glen Thomson and Gunnar Kraag, the team took to the field with trademark Team Canada colors of red on white, unembellished or distracted by commercial trademarks, but proudly proclaiming the genealogy of the CRA.

As self-identified underdogs, various strategies were considered, such as hockey sticks concealed behind the shin pads for ease of access should the need arise. Acknowledging the passion held for the game by our Mexican opponents, we settled on the mottos, “If they really want the ball, then give it to them,” and finally, “Have as much fun as possible.”

The team was made up of CRA members of all levels of skill and experience, but sharing unbridled enthusiasm and camaraderie. The Canadian team was co-ed and trans-generational, with participants ranging from the ages of 16-56 years, from elder statesmen to fellows, from progeny and friends to allied healthcare professionals. The Canadians were encouraged by an enthusiastic group of supporters in the stands, who braved the 30°C+ temperature and humidity.
For over 20 minutes, the indomitable Canadian team held the host Mexicans to a scoreless tie; numerous shots on the Mexican goal were repulsed by excellent goaltending by the Mexicans; more practice could certainly have made a difference. The final score of 5-0 for the CMR was not reflective of the effort and excellent field opportunities that at times caused concern in the CMR camp.

At the Awards Dinner, a number of “remarkable” participants were acknowledged. I paraphrase one of our goalkeepers, Hani El-Gabalawy: “Humbled but not humiliated.”

The team was unanimous in their perception that brought together not only the CRA and CMR, but also members of the CRA family. We are now scouting for the 2010 quadrennial meeting and contest—hockey anyone?

**Golf in Acapulco**

By Ivan McCully, MB, FRCPC

The first Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) “golf major” (and perhaps the only one we will ever have) was held at the Fairmont Acapulco Princess Golf Club on Sunday, February 19, 2006.

A strong field was assembled with five teams representing Ontario, Quebec, Western Canada, Eastern Canada and a team from the pharmaceutical industry.

We played a scramble format where everybody drives and then the best team ball is played. Theoretically, bad shots don’t matter unless the entire team “messes up” on the same shot.

The course was in excellent shape—more than can be said for my own golf.

The organizer conveniently lost the completed scorecard of the pharmaceutical team and, therefore, they were not eligible for the prizes.

Denis Choquette deprived the Quebec team of his silky golf swing when he mysteriously withdrew from the team at the last minute (rumor had it that Gunnar Kraag was getting a larger appearance fee than he was). However, the rest of the team, Henri-André Menard, Michel Gagné and his wife, looked unbeatable … until they moved from the practice ground to the first tee.

Due to their exhaustive practice rounds and intensive pre-season training sessions, the Western Canada team of Linda, Paul Ryan and Hani El-Gabalawy unfortunately peaked on the putting green just before play began.

The Ontario team of Duncan Gordon, Gunnar Kraag, Peter and Pat Lee started strongly. However, due to circumstances entirely within their control, they faded over the last few holes.

Eastern Canada proved to be the winning team, mainly due to their creative scoring system but also due to Ivan McCully’s driving (the electric cart, not the golfball), Ciaran Duffy’s gigantic distance off the tee, Jamie Henderson’s laser-like iron play and Dianne Mosher’s deadly putting. Indeed, Dianne’s 20-foot winning putt on the 18th green almost brought the crowd out of the bar.

After a great day on the course we adjourned to the 19th hole where refreshments were downed and stories of great shots that never took place were told.

Hopefully we will have another tournament in the future with all 10 provinces represented.
An Enchanting Meeting
By Diane Lacaille, MD, FRCPC

The 2006 CRA meeting in Acapulco was a nice change from the routine. The fantastic sunny and hot weather was a welcome break from the winter rains in Vancouver. Although I quite enjoy the skiing at Lake Louise and Mont-Tremblant, the beach was not a bad trade-off! The highlight of the change in venue from the ski hills to the sunny beach was being able to take my family along and, as we say in French, “joindre l’utile a l’agréable.” My kids (aged 5, 7 and 9 years) thoroughly enjoyed themselves, practically lived in the hotel pool and on the beach and were in total awe of the beautiful setting of the hotel. From the pink flamingos and peacocks, to the buffet breakfasts by the pool with its suspension bridge and waterfalls, they felt they were in an enchanted world that belongs in fairy tales. Taking “grand-maman” along was the best idea for all of us and a great solution for those who don’t have a spouse that can tag along at meetings. It gave the kids some precious time with their grandmother and relieved me of some of the pressure of juggling family and conferences/meetings. The kids quickly made friends with some of the other children brought along by Canadian and Mexican rheumatologists alike, and hopefully, they will get a chance to meet again at future CRA meetings!

All in all, the meeting was a great success: well organized, excellent scientific content, a nice opportunity to meet our Mexican colleagues and I even got to practice my Spanish listening to the presentations! It was definitely a nice change. My kids want to know: “Where and when will be the next one?”

A Great Success!
By Michel Gagné, MD, FRCPC

The first joint rheumatology congress with our Mexican colleagues was held in Acapulco from February 17 to 21, 2006. After serious doubt as to whether the congress could in fact take place, the organizers clearly made the right decision when it was moved from Cancun to Acapulco following Hurricane Wilma.

The dignified and solemn opening ceremony, which featured awards, diplomas, prizes, and music preceded the Welcome Cocktail Party.

The scientific program during the following days met participants’ expectations to the full. It was wide-ranging, interesting and participatory. Both Mexican and Canadian speakers held their audiences’ attention. The format of general sessions, with a keynote conference to start off each day, followed by simultaneous symposiums, was excellent.
The main conferences, given mid-morning, were:
• The Mayan Culture (M. Martinez-Lavin, A. Arellano)
• Differences in the Care of Arthrosis (G. Hawker)
• Estrogens and Rheumatic Disorders (L. García De La Torre, J. Sanchez Guerrero)
• Genomics: Identifying New Rheumatic Disease Genes in Canada (P. Rahman)

The various symposia were very well attended and covered rheumatoid arthritis, collagenoses, lupus, fibromyalgia, and pediatric rheumatology, to name a few.

It should be mentioned here that our pediatric colleagues have now joined the great family of the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA).

In short, the scientific component was highly appreciated, and our thanks are due to Dr. Janet Pope and her colleagues on the Scientific Committee.

All successful congresses have a well-organized social side as well. On Saturday, the Mexico-Canada soccer match, played in brilliant sunshine, showed just how serious our participants were. They followed Coach Zummer’s instructions to the letter: do not disappoint the fans of our host country, Mexico!

The CRA Dinner was held the next day against the background of the magnificent Acapulco Bay. It gave us an opportunity to congratulate recipients of the Distinguished Rheumatologist award (Dr. Ian Tsang) and Distinguished Investigator award (Dr. Jean-Luc Senécal). Congratulations to both of them!

Dr. Zummer showed great humor in handing over the reins of presidential power to Dr. Gunnar Kraag.

Monday night was Gala Night. Under the evening sky, backed by a highly energetic Mexican band, Canadian and Mexican rheumatologists really let off steam!

All in all, it was a dynamic, lively congress, representative of our respective cultures.

Our thanks to Dr. Michel Zummer, Chair of the Organizing Committee.

¡Hasta luego! Here’s to the next time!

Memories
Joanne Homik, MD, MSc, FRCPC

The combined Mexican rheumatology society and Canadian Rheumatology Association meeting in Acapulco this past February was a unique coming together of physicians from both countries. Some Canadian rheumatologists had the honor of being invited to speak at the Mexican meeting and have come back with stories of both the scholarly and social intensity of this meeting. My personal highlights included learning about the attitude and beliefs of Mexican rheumatologists, as well as their style of presentation, chairing and debating, and how they differ from ours. It was interesting to see the issues they highlighted and what sparked the most debate. The poster sessions clearly illustrated that there is a diverse range of rheumatology research of a very high caliber being done in Mexico.

On the social side of things, it is definitely true that we could learn a thing or two from the Mexicans about having fun. Rheumatologists that were very decorous and formal during the sessions really let their hair down in the evening. It was great to see the Mexican influence on us as we let loose on the dance floor at the final banquet.
PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Postcards from Paradise: Photo Contest

The CRAJ thanks all of those digital photo buffs for sending in their best pictures from Acapulco. The photo contest categories were: Scenic, Candid, and Portrait. However, the subject matter blurred somewhat between these arbitrary delineations. Our expert judging panel reviewed the images at length. Our winners are highlighted below, along with the “runners-up” of excellent quality. All of our printed contestants will receive the much-coveted, official, limited-edition CRA backpack.

If you would like your photo to grace the pages of the CRAJ, please send us a “Postcard from Paradise” featuring you and a copy of the CRAJ in your exotic vacation spot (digital images preferred). You just might find yourself hiking Killarney in Ontario, Ireland or Manitoba with the pride of the luggage industry: the CRA backpack! Winners and runners-up will be published in the Holiday issue. Please get your photos in before October 1, 2006.

WINNER for BEST SCENIC PHOTO:  
Fred Doris

WINNER for BEST CANDID PHOTO:  
Jason Kur

WINNER for BEST PORTRAIT:  
Murray Urowitz
PHOTO CONTEST RUNNERS-UP

RUNNERS-UP for BEST SCENIC PHOTO:

Gilles Boire (above), Fred Doris (top right),
Morton Kapusta (right)

RUNNERS-UP for BEST PORTRAIT:
Valérie Couton (below),
Michel Zummer (bottom right)
The CRA-CMR Congress, Acapulco, February 2006