

Tropical Thunder

By Glen Thomson, MD, FRCPC

The 2nd Mexican-Canadian Congress of Rheumatology began amidst tropical thunder in the splendor of Cancun, located in upbeat Quintana Roo, Mexico. Some Canadians attended the musculoskeletal pre-course, including Dr. Johannes Roth from Ottawa. The Arthritis Health Professions Association (AHPA) pre-course, organized by Marlene Thompson and Terri Lupton, featured notable rheumatologists Drs. Janet Pope, Ken Blocka, Doug Smith, Marvin Fritzler and Paul Fortin. The resident's pre-course was the first official Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) event. This was also known as the "miracle of Cancun" as Dr. Eric Rich's amazing conjuring act included taking an empty room and filling it with chairs, audiovisual equipment, and breakfast for the residents and faculty within 26 minutes.

Pomp and circumstance surrounded the opening gala, where Canadians were officially welcomed by president of the Mexican College of Rheumatology (MCR) Dr. Olga Vera-Lastra. This year marked the 50th anniversary of the MCR. Photographs of MCR past presidents were on a giant wall poster; a giant canvas portrayed past Canadian presidents with photographs from their prime years. The MCR Masters certificates were presented with intimate biographies, followed by the introduction of MCR past presidents. CRA past presidents on the stage included Drs. Tony Russell, Paul Davis, Jean-Luc Senécal, Simon Carette, Glen Thomson, Dianne Mosher, Michel Zimmer, Arthur Bookman, Gunnar Kraag and John Thomson, along with current chief Jamie Henderson, who made a



The Dunlop-Dottridge lecturer Dr. Sherine Gabriel with Dr. Jamie Henderson, CRA President



Drs. John Thomson and Michel Zimmer, and CRA Manager Christine Charnock

trilingual address to the audience. In the midst of the presentations, someone fainted, and all of the Canadian past presidents wondered which of our number had hit the deck. One of the young female attendants on the stage had passed out, but was successfully on her feet within a few minutes. Certificates were presented to each of the CRA past presidents and Dr. Russell led the procession off the stage. There followed a well-populated cocktail reception kept indoors by the blustery weather. At that point, some CRA members made side tours to other locations of historical interest, like that of local hero Jimmy Buffet.

The plenary sessions began early Friday morning with "point chair" Dr. Carter Thorne. A few technical glitches did not detract from the strong scientific component. The pre-eminent Mayo Clinic rheumatologist and former president of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), Dr. Sherine Gabriel, presented the Dunlop-Dottridge lecture "Heart Disease and Rheumatoid Arthritis." The response of the audience was overwhelmingly positive, as was the personal welcome to Dr. Gabriel, whose pedigree includes University of Saskatchewan, an internship in Winnipeg, and epidemiology training under Dr. Claire Bombardier in the University of Toronto/McMaster program.

The Saturday program also featured three simultaneous symposia. The session on Basic Science Immunology of Rheumatic Diseases, chaired by Dr. Joanne Homik, featured cutting-edge science by Dr. Gilles Boire and Dr. Fritzler. There were no pregnant pauses as Dr. Mosher kept Drs. Earl Silverman and Stephanie Keeling on time in

the Pregnancy and Rheumatic Diseases symposium. Dr. Steve Edworthy will renew his subscription to *National Geographic* after the excellent talks by Drs. Carol Hitchon and Christine Peschken on geo-epidemiology.

The first Pearls session, chaired bilingually by Dr. Ricardo Cartagena, was a great success thanks to Dr. Robert Offer and Dr. Kraag's Ottawa protégé, Dr. Nataliya Milman, with their audience-stumping cases.

Later that night, the CRA's version of the Oscars annual awards dinner began with the AHPA awards presented by Marlene Thompson. Dr. Murray Baron made an impassioned plea for stable research funds for academics in his introduction of former lawyer and the CRA's 2011 Young Investigator awardee Dr. Marie Hudson. Dr. Alf Cividino, the 2010 Teacher Educator awardee, introduced the 2011 awardee Dr. Nader Khalidi, who cited as one of his influences Dr. Jane Purvis, who encouraged his rheumatologic aspirations while he was a family practitioner. Accompanied by Dr. Mosher, Dr. Bombardier introduced the CRA's 2011 Distinguished Investigator, Dr. Gillian Hawker, who shared her secrets of professional success in a succinct slide show. The CRA's highest award—that of Distinguished Rheumatologist—was presented at the end of the evening, as Dr. John Thomson introduced Canada's leading rheumatologist, Dr. Kraag. Gunnar gave a fast-moving set of vignettes on the turning points in his career and those who have influenced his course. He stated that the only thing that has never been overrated is being a grandfather. Gunnar still has a number of professional goals, including attaining the Young Investigator Award, but traveling to Texas is no longer on his agenda. He received a CRA commemorative plaque, as well as a Kraag 2011 football jersey “on behalf of grateful fans every-



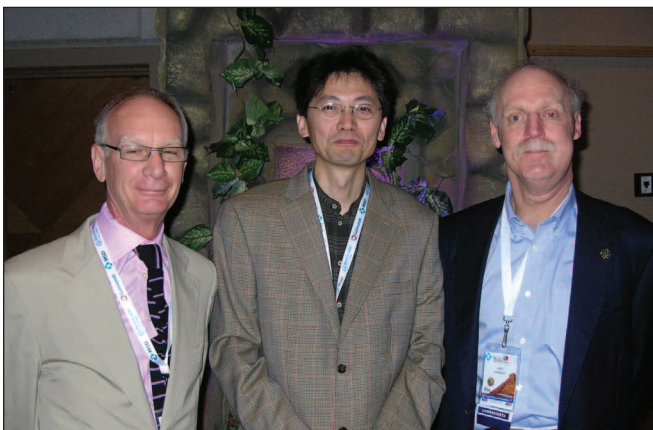
2011 Draft Pick

where” in recognition of his decision to pursue a career in medicine and not professional football. Celebratory dancing proceeded shortly after.

Though it was hard to get up on Sunday morning, Dr. Zummer chaired the plenary session on spondyloarthropathies (SpA), which also included MCR presentations on systemic sclerosis. The MCR's keynote speaker, Dr. Luis Javier Jara Quezada, led a talk on antiphospholipid syndrome. The simultaneous sessions were highlighted by Dr. Russell, who introduced the spondyloarthritis version of the dynamic duo, Drs. Robert Inman and Walter Maksymowych. Not to be outdone, Dr. Peter Docherty chaired the session with two scleroderma wonder women: Drs. Pope and Hudson. The juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) tour de force, featuring Drs. Rae Yeung and Ciaren Duffy, was led by Dr. Lori Tucker. Dr. Bookman organized the poster session tours and, with able assistance from Dr. John Esdaile and Dr. Duffy, a number of Canadian and Mexican posters were presented in a more intimate setting.

The Xcaret bus tour that afternoon and evening gave us a sobering view of Mexican living conditions off the hotel strip. The stage production at Xcaret can only be described by a series of superlatives. All who took this trip enjoyed Mayan culture, replete with a ball-hockey game with an incendiary device, flying acrobats, and a spectrum of Mexican music.

Monday morning began with the CRA symposium on challenges and advances in lupus, hosted by Dr. Esdaile and featuring Drs. Dafna Gladman, Christian Pineau and Dr. Fritzler. Dr. Cory Baillie chaired the plenary session on systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Introduced by past president Dr. John Thomson, the CRA keynote speaker,



Keynote Speaker Dr. Hyon Choi with Dr. John Esdaile (left) and Dr. John Thomson (right)

Dr. Hyon Choi, rekindled interest in the subject of gout. Three solid simultaneous symposia followed, making the decision of what to see extremely difficult. It was a Montreal morning, with Dr. Denis Choquette chairing the Rheumatoid Arthritis Management pair Drs. Paul Haraoui and Sasha Bernatsky. Dr. Cividino led the Montreal Canadiens, Dr. Yves Troyanov and Dr. Sénécal, who scored with their presentations on Inflammatory Myopathies. On the sports medicine theme, Dr. Kraag introduced Saskatchewan Roughriders physician and rheumatologist Dr. Robert McDougall. Dr. Leblanc demonstrated sports medicine injuries with her crutches and cast from her tibia-fibula fracture. If there were an award for most courageous rheumatologist attending the meeting, it would be awarded to her. The final Pearls session featured fascinating cases by Dr. Umjeet Jolly and Dr. Docherty from the University of Western Ontario. Dr. Cartagena kept the session moving well despite some minor audio-visual challenges.

Our gracious hosts from the MCR organized the closing gala Sunday night at the Convention Centre. There was opportunity again to thank the MCR for their work in collaborating on this Congress. People had the chance for some pleasant informal discussions; I even learned that there was a beach in Cancun.

The final day started with the CRA Annual General Meeting. There was a surprisingly good turnout, given the previous night's festivities. The session ran a little late but Dr. Diane Lacaille made a good recovery, getting the plenary session on Epidemiology and Health Services Research up and running quickly. The keynote speaker on SpA was the well known and respected Dr. Rubén Burgos-Vargas. With Dr. Andy Thompson at the helm, the early rheumatoid arthritis session navigated through basic science to epidemiology, helped by Drs. Hani El-Gabalawy and Vivian Bykerk. Dr. Suzanne Ramsey introduced the topic pediatric vasculitis and lupus, in conjunction with the effervescent Dr. Susanne Benseler and enthusiastic Dr. David Cabral. The morning's solid performances were anchored by insightful talks on biologic therapies for orphan diseases by Drs. Esdaile and Khalidi under the watchful eye of Dr. Carette. Dr. Bookman reprised his role as the tour guide, with colleagues Dr. Kam Shojania and Dr. Maksymowych, discussing the best posters. Unfortunately, the turnout was less than expected as many were already packing and heading to the airport.

This year, the trainees' and students' abstract presentations were spread throughout the Residents Day, as well as

the plenary sessions. Since the last plenary session was on the Tuesday morning, there was no official event at which the winners of the various prizes could be recognized. The University of Toronto claimed 4 of the 5 awards. Congratulations are in order for all of the students and trainees for their excellent work!

The meeting adjourned with the final analysis demonstrating equal parts of the exotic, educational, and fun. Dr. Zummer and Christine Charnock worked ceaselessly for three years, planning the logistics with a very successful outcome. Drs. Thomson and Henderson provided the CRA's political guidance to initiate and complete this task with our colleagues from the MCR. I am personally indebted to the CRA scientific program committee, Drs. Lacaille, Cartagena, Edworthy, Homik, Zummer, Bookman, Rich, Tucker and Cividino, for their inspiration and perspiration.

I have received 1,643 incoming e-mails about the meeting (and counting)—was it worth it all? Personally, I am grateful for the opportunity to experience the difference in customs, language and organizational cultures between the two associations. There were certainly challenges at times, but ultimately, I think we were all rewarded with exemplary presentations from MCR and CRA speakers and the warmth and hospitality of our MCR hosts. Each CRA meeting provides the camaraderie of our Canadian colleagues from coast to coast, no matter where it is held. It was an honor to serve as the CRA's scientific program director for this special Congress.

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Dr. Diane Lacaille, Abstract Chair