

All the Luck in the World

By Jody Lewtas, MD, FRCPC

It is probably a good thing to reflect a little when you are nearing 20 years in practice. When I started my rheumatology residency, I would never have imagined how exciting the day-to-day practice would become. I always said that it was the variety of rheumatology that was so attractive. Cardiologists deal with chest pain, shortness of breath and syncope. Rheumatologists, on the other hand, seem to deal with every complaint known to man, and that turns out to be a lot of complaints! There is rarely a dull moment and that is the advantage. The disadvantage results in my writing more antibiotic scripts for urinary tract infections than most family physicians.

Although I could easily be accused of having blinders on to other specialties, the explosion in therapeutics in our field is still truly astounding. When I started practice, methotrexate was a cool drug and we started warily at 5 mg weekly. Eight effusions and mangled hands was a good outcome if the patient was not complaining of as much pain as before treatment. We spent lots of time in rounds discussing how individual deformities developed, something that people don't really care to know today. When we see patients in the office, we are so intolerant of swelling, trying to weigh the best course of action when there are so many choices at our fingertips. It seems that new pathways are presented at national meetings one year, with novel drugs to block those pathways the next. The science is fascinating and delivering the science to our patients, with their individual worries, comorbidities and tolerance for risk, really challenges the educator, salesperson and clinician in us all.

When you feel you may have finally gotten a handle on some of the aspects mentioned above, the next patient on the day sheet hails from the strange land of Fibromyalgia. It may be an okay place to visit, but I certainly would



Dr. Jody Lewtas, reflecting on her luck in the rheumatology field.

never want to live there. People are plagued with misery. They worsen with every appointment, and I have always found this mathematically mystifying as they are about as bad as they can imagine from the start. I find myself slipping into feel-good comments and motivational vocabulary that would embarrass Oprah (and the medical student I used to be).

I practice in Markham, Ontario, which is in York Region, just north of Toronto. The community is growing faster than methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) on a swab. Our patients come from all over the world with stories of their lives that are nearly as fascinating as the practice of rheumatology. Nearly.

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From around the CRA ...



Important meeting! Smart people! Big Decisions! (Who let Paul in?)



President Henderson: Talk about intense! Dr. Bookman: Somewhat less intense!