

Rheumatology in Quebec

By Murray Baron, MD, FRCPC

Montreal is not only a rich cultural city, but we are also endowed with a richness of rheumatologists and rheumatology centers. The Jewish General Hospital in Montreal is one of the McGill teaching hospitals. We have probably had the fastest rate of growth of the rheumatology divisions in Montreal, as we have expanded from two to five full-time rheumatologists in the past five years. Although our salaries may not be the highest in Canada, it can be hard to beat living in Montreal!

For years, I and Laeora Berkson were the only rheumatologists in our hospital. The situation started to change when Dr. Marie Hudson came on board in 2006, followed by Dr. Sabrina Fallavollita in 2010 and Dr. Geneviève Gyger in 2011.

I have developed and directed the Canadian Scleroderma Research Group (CSRG) since 2004. The group has been funded by patient societies, industry and, most importantly, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and has been very successful in terms of publications in the past few years. Dr. Berkson has an interest as a medical educator and has worked extensively in curriculum development. She was a Carter Wallace Scholar in medical education and a recipient of a Canadian Arthritis Society Clinician Teacher Award. An article on problem-based learning, published early in her career, is included in *Academic Medicine's AM Classics Collection*.

Dr. Hudson, who won this year's Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) Young Investigator Award, is the only full-time researcher of the group. She is funded by the CIHR and has published important papers about scleroderma. Her work has put the CSRG on the world map of scleroderma research.

Dr. Fallavollita has a particular interest in early inflammatory arthritis, and is in the process of developing expertise in musculoskeletal ultrasound. Dr. Gyger, our newest recruit, also has an interest in scleroderma, having spent a year as a fellow of the CSRG, and has now developed expertise in videocapillaroscopy. This technique provides spectacular pictures of nailfold capillaries and she will be able to provide this service to all McGill rheumatologists.

As I went through this hiring process in the past few years, especially of an academic physician, a few thoughts came to me which were reinforced when, at the recent CRA meeting in Mexico, I presented Dr. Hudson for her Young



Dr. Baron and the team from the Jewish General Hospital.

Investigator award. As I looked through the list of other recent winners of that award, I was struck by the fact that, for several years, no award was presented. In this country of over 30 million people, with an excellent cadre of rheumatology researchers, why did we go through years when we could not find a single new investigator worthy of this honour? We are either not attracting academically oriented physicians to our specialty or something is turning them off once they are in it. It is not hard to understand why someone who has spent years learning clinical medicine and then clinical rheumatology would want to stick with clinical practice. This may be especially true when you consider how difficult it is to find competitive funding for academics. Luckily, Quebec has instituted a new program for academics, in which the medicare payor funds academics (roughly defined as someone with a CIHR or equivalent salary support award) over and above their salary support up to the median, plus 10% of that specialty's earnings.

If, as a rheumatology community, we want to continue to see the development of research in our field, we must begin to address the hurdles involved in turning our graduates into academics. I do not have the answers to this dilemma but perhaps it is time to start to think about this and advocate for what may be needed to strengthen our research community.

Murray Baron, MD, FRCPC

*Chief, Division of Rheumatology, Jewish General Hospital
Associate Professor of Medicine, McGill University
Montreal, Quebec*