

# Rheumatology in Paradise

By Robert Offer, MD, FRCPC, FACR

You might wonder how rheumatologists can make a living in the Okanagan Valley (a.k.a. the California of Canada). There are currently six full-time adult rheumatologists and one pediatric rheumatologist (Dr. Kathy Gross) in the Okanagan, a population of approximately 250,000. With a population of 147,000, Kelowna has four adult rheumatologists, while Penticton, a retirement community of 36,000, has two adult rheumatologists plus Dr. Gross, who supervises the pediatric program for the B.C. interior. Given the usually quoted ratio of one rheumatologist per 75,000, it would appear that we should be starving. Quite to the contrary, current workloads are ideal, with urgent referrals being seen quickly and routine patients waiting three to 12 months. Our workload is greater than population predictions for two reasons:

- many arthritis patients move to the warm and dry Okanagan; and
- a lot of our patients travel from afar as many areas, such as the Kootenays, have minimal arthritis services.

We have recently been joined by two young rheumatologists: Dr. Nima Shojania moved from Vancouver to West Kelowna, and Dr. Anick Godin departed Sherbrooke,



Hailing from Sherbrooke, Dr. Anick Godin now calls Kelowna home.



Dr. Nima Shojania and his daughter enjoying the B.C. scenery.

Quebec, to join Dr. Stuart Siegel in Kelowna. Kelowna's fourth rheumatologist is the venerable Dr. Dan MacLeod. Drs. Shojania and MacLeod continue to travel to north and central B.C. on consultation trips.

Penticton's Dr. Jackie Stewart continues to stay in Ironman shape, having completed yet another race, and like the local wines, she states she is improving with age. Starting in 1975, I was the first to practice rheumatology between Calgary and Vancouver; though I am past retirement age, I consider my career only half over.

The Kelowna and Penticton rheumatologists get together frequently, usually at a scenic winery halfway between their locales. With the recent addition of Drs. Shojania and Godin, our journal club is flourishing and we are attracting visiting speakers. We are all delighted to have Dr. Godin bring her ultrasound skills to the valley. All in all, the rheumatology is as good as the wine in the Okanagan!

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