Jo**l**ha all, I am pleased to be reporting about the 5th Rheumatology Winter Clinical Symposium (RWCS) from Maui, Hawaii from the perspective of my 4th consecutive year attending. The conference is the brain-child of several of the most prominent rheumatologists in the United States and features a review of many topics, including the most recent American College of Rheumatology (ACR) conference in the context of a beautiful and warm setting during the most intense part of the winter.

The symposium is relatively small, with about 200 physicians mostly from the United States mainland. The Canadian contingent is usually about 60 or so, with many of your friends and colleagues in attendance. Many of the Canadians have been to multiple RWCS conferences and realize not only the educational value, but also the inherent beauty of the venue.

The conference is headed by Dr. Arthur Kavanaugh, a respected Professor of Rheumatology at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and features well known experts in the field including, Dr. Vibeke Strand, Dr. Eric Ruderman, Dr. Jack Cush, Dr. Roy Fleischmann, Dr. Marty Bergman, joined this year by Dr. Ted Pincus, as well as several other presenters.

The format is fairly informal with sessions this year covering the Year in Review of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA) and spondyloarthropathy, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), primary Sjögren’s Syndrome (SjS), and vasculitis. There were talks on how to approach myositis and multiple reviews on newer oral small molecules that are coming to market in the near future.

One particularly interesting session was a point-counterpoint discussion about the notion of treat-to-target. This particular debate, between Dr. Fleischmann and Dr. Bergman, was both comical and enlightening. The Canadians in the audience, most of whom perform tender and swollen joint counts on their patients regularly, found the arguments surprising. There is a cadre of American rheumatologists who do not physically examine their patients at most, if not all, of their visits, relying solely on patient-derived measures.

Joining us from New York, Dr. Pincus delivered the Kahuna lecture this year and was presented the Kahuna bowl, a prize given to our own Dr. Ed Keystone just last year. This year’s lecture was a revelation about the effectiveness of the Routine Assessment of Patient Index Data 3 (RAPID3), a measure of patient function, which I now incorporate in
my practice along with the Clinical Disease Activity Index (CDAI).

All in all, the conference provides an exceptionally practical review of the topics that are important to clinical practice. It helps to interpret the important and relevant topics that may be difficult to understand when you attend a larger conference such as the ACR. There is always ample time to question the speakers, and opportunities to approach them on a personal level during the breaks to discuss issues. I was able to clarify some points this year with Dr. Kavanaugh over a snack, and he was very approachable and helpful. Many of our Canadian colleagues that attended had the same experience. The setting of the conference is informal and the presenters are relaxed. Their goal is to make this a satisfying experience. Where else do the attendees and the presenters dress in shorts?

Needless to say, the setting of the conference is second to none. The weather is spectacular and there are many outdoors activities to participate in; these include scenic drives as well as activities such as snorkeling, sailing, scuba, and whale and dolphin watching. The hotel, the Marriott Wailea, is spectacular and the sunsets are breathtaking.

This year, several of us went on an excursion to the island of Lanai. We were treated to a beautiful rugged environment, including a desert setting. Minutes later, we were traveling in our jeep along a dusty off-road trail to a deserted, pristine two-mile long Polihua Beach. It was an experience we will not soon forget.

The trip to the South Pacific is well worth it and everyone should consider attending RWCS 2013 in Maui next February. It is well worth your attention; watch the internet for announcements. I fully expect to attend my 5th consecutive RWCS. Bon voyage and see you there. Mahalo.

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