

an excellent opportunity to let people in the arthritis community know about the project," says Jennifer Boyle, clinical research manager at ACREU. ACREU is providing the evaluation expertise for the project. Dr. Bell presented the project to the executive of the CRA. "The CRA is very much on board and excited about the project," says Dr. Bell. Dr. Dianne Mosher, who sits on the Advisory Committee for *Getting a Grip on Arthritis*, also made a presentation about the project to the CRA membership at its annual general meeting. As well, Ms. Lineker presented the project to the AHPA membership who attended the conference.

Dr. Bell speaks about the project with enthusiasm: "This project will affect national healthcare policy. A

national, integrated, client-centred approach to the management of arthritis will help pave the way to lower healthcare costs and improved client outcomes."

To learn more about *Getting a Grip on Arthritis*, please call toll free 1-800-321-1433.



ExpertMD®: A Rheumatology Program Serving Patients in Canada

It is not groundbreaking news to state that manpower in rheumatology is in high demand and that patient access to expert advice is too often delayed for unnecessarily extended periods of time. We could, consequently, be under the impression that primary-care physicians can easily compensate for this shortage. Unfortunately, this is not the case either. In fact, the training that primary-care physicians receive in diseases of the musculoskeletal system adds up to a few weeks—at the very most. It is definitely illusory to think that such training is sufficient to adequately manage the diagnosis and treatment of these diseases.

Based on these premises, a group of Canadian rheumatologists, with the financial and logistic support of Merck Frosst Canada Inc.'s department of on-line Continuing Medical Education, have developed a new rheumatology program known as ExpertMD®. Approximately 250 primary-care physicians, with a particular interest in diseases of the musculoskeletal system, were recruited and have been following intensive training on the multiple aspects of these diseases for the last 12 months. In the first phase, a module on the general approach to arthritis, followed by two other modules on arthrosis and rheumatoid arthritis, respectively, have been developed and given to these physicians. The second phase, consisting of three modules, is in the process of being completed. This phase covers the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs/coxibs, depending on the scientific evidence available, followed by a module on soft-tissue diseases, with emphasis on infiltration indi-

cations and techniques. A module on lower back pain will be implemented in the fall of 2004.

Various adult-training strategies are used in all the courses, including formal educational meetings, tutorials and on-line clinical cases from the ExpertMD® internet site.

The modules can be transmitted in synchronous mode or asynchronously. All modules are preceded by a needs assessment, as well as an assessment of competence levels. The purpose of this learning mode variation is to allow better retention and better application of the knowledge acquired. The quality of the program is well proven by the fact that it has been granted 25 level C credits by the College of Family Physicians of Canada. This is the highest level of accreditation ever issued to an ongoing training program in Canada.

To date, comments have been very positive and very constructive; the assessments have also been very positive. The retention rate of physicians in the program exceeds 75%.

The ExpertMD® program is a very tangible example of a constructive partnership between a group of rheumatologists concerned about the progress of rheumatology in Canada, a pharmaceutical company, family physicians and two collaborating universities: the universities of Alberta and Laval.

— Denis Choquette, MD, FRCPC
National President,
ExpertMD® Rheumatology Program