

Active, Growing and Continuing to Advocate for Arthritis Care

It has been a very exciting year. The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) has been working diligently, addressing various issues and promoting rheumatologists as the experts in arthritis care, research and education. Although healthcare delivery is provincial, we all share the same problems and challenges.

With the shortage and maldistribution of rheumatologists, we cannot possibly see all patients who are referred to us. The CRA recently published, in the *Medical Post* and *l'Actualité Médicale*, an article (available on the CRA website) describing how to properly refer patients to rheumatology. Many of us are including this in correspondence that is sent back to the referring physician. We hope that such educational efforts will assist in our daily practices.

Rheumatologists spend considerable time discussing treatment options with patients and with other physicians. On the CRA website, an announcement to guide prescribers of rofecoxib (Vioxx®) was recently released. This release was highly successful in that it was widely distributed in local and national news media, as well as medical print. It is encouraging that rheumatologists are becoming better known as experts in the field of arthritis. The CRA will continue to elevate the profile of our specialty. Next, we will be releasing a patient information sheet that will focus on the current use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and cox-2 inhibitors. In association with pharmacist organizations, we are starting to address the validity of the information transmitted to our patients about their medications. The objective is to promote consistency in what patients hear from their doctors and pharmacists.

We all know that much of our work in caring for our patients lies outside the actual medical visit. Coordinating care, chasing after resources and medications, consulting on the telephone, filling out forms and many additional tasks occupy much of our time. I am very excited about an audit project that we have just launched which concentrates on the way we practice and how we allocate our time. The project also looks at how we provide care to patients with rheumatoid arthri-

tis, including patient access to resources and medications. PDAs will be available to all interested members. Participants will be able to record a two-week practice sample and then view and compare personal and confidential data with other participating rheumatologists via our website. We plan to present the results of this pilot study in March 2005 at our annual meeting in Mont-Tremblant. You will be invited to pick up your PDA in Mont-Tremblant if you wish to participate. This audit will provide information crucial to provincial representatives in discussions with policy makers, as well as to rheumatologists fighting locally for resources.

Without a doubt, our most significant activity is our annual meeting. We have the unique challenge of planning the 2005 and 2006 meetings concurrently, as the latter is being organized conjointly with the Mexican College of Rheumatology. The next meeting in Mont-Tremblant will continue to provide all the elements that have made our annual general meeting the tremendous success it has become. It has been improved by listening to the membership and increasing the interactivity and the French component. The program is terrific and promises not to disappoint.

While these activities and many others have improved our professional lives somewhat, we still face major hurdles. The CRA continues to promulgate the importance of rheumatologists as the experts in arthritis. The Alliance for the Canadian Arthritis Program (ACAP) is planning a standards-of-care conference next year and three rheumatologists have taken a leadership role in this endeavour. We hope this effort will help improve the local infrastructures and resources available to patients so that we may provide the best possible care. While chronic diseases have appeared on the radar of the health ministries, the most debilitating illness, arthritis, is far from being recognized. This must change. We will continue to advocate on behalf of arthritis care.

The major concern of the CRA is its members, whether their practices are academic or independent, adult or pediatric, English or French. We are focused on improving the quality of our practices through varied efforts, which ultimately result in better patient care. The CRA

Vice-Presidential Greetings

continues to grow and increase its activities and impact. My gratitude goes to the numerous members who volunteer their time serving on our committees. Your input is invaluable and very much appreciated. Our committee chairs have many ambitious plans and their commitment ensures success in our efforts. I would like to personally thank Gunnar Kraag, Jamie Henderson and Art Bookman for their support and responsiveness to all my emails, and Christine Charnock for keeping it all together.

Best wishes to our membership and I hope that we will all find plenty of time to spend with family and friends during the holiday season.

– Michel Zummer, MD, FRCPC
President, CRA



We've Come A Long Way

This is the “Holiday” issue of the *Canadian Rheumatology Association Journal (CRAJ)* so let me start by extending best wishes to everyone. I hope that you have plenty of time to enjoy family and friends. I might also add that a copy of the *CRAJ* would make an excellent stocking stuffer. There is a small charge for copies signed by the editor; otherwise they are free!

Several people have asked me why I took on the position of Vice-President.

The quick answer is that it seemed like a good idea at the time. I had given up almost all of my hospital and university administrative roles so I thought this would be an opportunity to stay active for an extremely worthwhile cause. Moreover, since I love all the people involved at the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA)'s executive and board levels, I looked forward to the interaction. Besides, Dr. Arthur Bookman has been telling me what to do for over 30 years, for gosh sakes! I would feel rudderless without him. Furthermore, I was honoured that the nominating committee even thought of me...so how could I refuse? I have since learned that this committee was immediately disbanded and no longer has any role in the executive.

Since then, reality has set in. The CRA executive is no longer a cozy little group that gets together once or twice a year for a little chit-chat. Dr. Michel Zummer, as well as Dr. Bookman, and Dr. Dianne Mosher before him, have worked tirelessly to develop a vision and business plan with a solid infrastructure of committees that has transformed our organization into a first-class operation. Communication occurs almost daily via e-mail and conference calls, as well as annual retreats, including meetings of

the Industry Council. If there is an issue of importance, a meeting that needs to take place, the CRA flag to be waved, Dr. Zummer is either there himself or makes sure someone is there representing him. You are all aware of the mammoth job Dr. Janet Pope does to assure a superb meeting and Dr. Jamie Henderson has taken over from Dr. Carter Thorne to assure that the management committee keeps our organization financially healthy. Sponsorship is at an all-time high. I still recall the last meeting I attended when the CRA was held in conjunction with the Royal College—there were three members in a large room listening to a superb presentation by a visiting speaker. We've come a long way since then. No more occasional chats, a few drinks and a few laughs. This is serious business and the members have come to expect excellence.

What was I thinking?

My role at present is to observe, listen, and follow orders. Unless someone wises up, I will be president and expected to match Dr. Zummer's work ethic, dedication and obvious skills. A daunting challenge! Fortunately, the CRA has a superb executive assistant, Christine Charnock, without whom most of us would immediately resign.

I will end on a personal note. I am proud to say I have become a grandfather for the first time. It is one of the few experiences in life that is not over-rated. What a thrill! Merry Christmas! Happy Holidays!



– Gunnar Kraag, MD, FRCPC
Vice-President, CRA