

News of the North

By Dale Sholter, MD, FRCPC

When asked to take over Dr. Sharon LeClercq's Yellowknife clinics in 1997 I knew I would have big shoes to fill. Sharon had been serving the Northwest Territories and western Nunavut for nine years, and I was finishing my rheumatology fellowship at the University of Alberta with plans to join Dr. LeClercq, Dr. Avril Fitzgerald and Dr. Alexander Yan in community practice in Edmonton. With some trepidation, I said yes!

I finished my fellowship at the end of June that year and flew up to Yellowknife a week later. Dr. John Morse, a general internist/gastroenterologist, and Dot Bergman, the clinic manager, offered a warm welcome. The first evening I wore a tie to dinner, but quickly realized I was vastly overdressed. We went to Bullocks' Bistro, a charming place that serves fresh, locally caught fish. Dinner was



Bullocks' Bistro, home of the man-eating mosquitoes.



Walking over the Canadian Shield to the hospital.

fantastic. We were seated on the patio – but oh, the mosquitoes! One of the servers took care of that, liberally spraying us with bug spray as she zipped from table to table.

It seemed I saw more patients during those four days of clinic than I had in my entire fellowship! And how come nothing followed the textbooks? The pathology was unbelievable. I continue to be amazed at what I see considering the entire population is fewer than 50,000 people. My patients are warm and genuinely appreciate being seen; over 50% of the population is Aboriginal, representing a wide variety of groups from Dogrib to Inuvialuit.

Currently I do a busy four-day clinic in Yellowknife four times per year. Usually once or twice per year one of our rheumatology trainees from the University of Alberta joins me. Patients are flown in from various communities including Inuvik, Cambridge Bay, Fort

Smith, and Hay River. The nurses, occupational therapists (OTs), and physiotherapists (PTs) are a great bunch to work with and I'm fortunate to often have an OT or PT in clinic with me. I am currently exploring alternative models of care delivery in order to improve quality and accessibility.

I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to be a part of providing care to Northern peoples now for 17 years.

*Dale Sholter, MD, FRCPC
Associate Clinical Professor, Division of Rheumatology
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta*



Atop Pilots Monument overlooking the houseboats on Great Slave Lake.