

Every Member Campaign Draws New Recruits to Rheumatology

In 1991, The Arthritis Society (TAS) funded a research fellowship for Dr. Joanne Homik, helping kick-start the career of the current CRA Vice-President. Over the years Dr. Homik stayed involved, becoming chair of the Society's medical advisory committee and a national board member, after which she continued to help raise funds through the Walk to Fight Arthritis. Dr. Homik's support now continues through the *Every Member* campaign.

"This campaign aligns perfectly with what I desired to do all along," says Dr. Homik, a professor of medicine at the University of Alberta.

A joint project between the CRA and TAS, *Every Member* is a five-year, \$2 million campaign to inspire a future generation of rheumatology clinicians and researchers. Funds donated by CRA members will join those raised by other donors to help attract top medical students to the field, boosting the capacity for care and research, and hopefully raising the number of practising rheumatologists in Canada far above the 350 where it now stands.

Dr. Gilles Boire, professor of medicine at Université de Sherbrooke, says when he first entered the field there were few effective tools to ease a patient's pain. He notes that, "now we can treat most inflammatory conditions effectively and, for diseases that once appeared hopeless, we can do much to prevent complications and improve disease manifestations." Still, Dr. Boire recognizes a major need among Canadian arthritis patients must be filled: "Three hundred and fifty rheumatologists is about half of what we need."

Dr. Boire has also pledged to the *Every Member* campaign, recalling that TAS was the first to support him as a fellow amidst a difficult period for rheumatology research. He considers the field of rheumatology very rewarding for, unlike decades ago, patients with severe inflammation and chronic pain can return to work and to a better quality of life.

"We are in a position to change people's lives profoundly," he says, adding that this message is reaching more and more medical students on the clinical side, though he

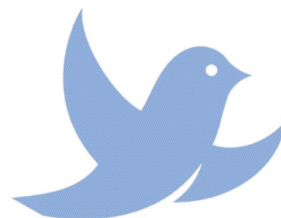
cautions that the growth among researchers remains slow, itself a concern for the future of arthritis care.

Dr. Homik chose to study rheumatology after practising alongside a Winnipeg rheumatologist and witnessing the care required to address patients' problems as well as the stoicism these patients projected in the face of their disease. "It's a hands-on specialty: examining the patient, listening to their story, getting the full picture," she says. "We are still a specialty that doesn't rely on a lot of tests to find the answers."

Dr. Homik notes it is always a challenge to attract more recruits to rheumatology. At the University of Alberta, she shares her enthusiasm for the field with medical students and residents who spend time on the service. Many, she observes, are surprised to discover the full breadth of patients in the care of rheumatologists.

"I'm pleased that TAS and the CRA are interested in developing opportunities that expose students to rheumatology," Dr. Homik says. "Even if they don't become rheumatologists, the hope is they become more competent physicians in terms of assessing people with arthritis. If I can create a more informed family doctor or surgeon or cardiologist, then that benefits all people with arthritis."

For more information about the *Every Member* campaign, or to make your pledge, please contact The Arthritis Society's Kathryn De Carlo at 416-979-7228 ext. 3395, or kdecarlo@arthritis.ca.



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