
History of the Arthritis Health Professions Association

By Jennifer Burt, BScPT

Attempts to start a professional body of allied health professionals working in rheumatology in Ontario began in the 1970s. Planning began in earnest in the early 1980s and was supported by The Arthritis Society (TAS), Ontario Division. In her capacity as Director of Allied Health Education, Carolyn Thomas worked with a core group of dedicated allied health professionals from the Toronto area to establish the association known then as the Arthritis Health Professions

Association of Ontario (AHPA, Ontario). Carolyn was instrumental in translating the vision into a reality; when she retired from TAS, AHPA granted her an honorary lifetime membership and established the Carolyn Thomas Award to acknowledge her support of scientific research.

In 2000, due to growing interest from across Canada, our name dropped the reference to Ontario; with that, the Association's mandate expanded to take a national perspective that welcomed members from across Canada.

The mission of the AHPA is to:

- Stimulate interest in rheumatology among health professionals.
- Promote research and education in the field of rheumatology.
- Encourage interprofessional communication.
- Act as a resource body for those with an interest in rheumatology.
- Promote public awareness of the needs of people with arthritis.

AHPA members started attending the CRA Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) in 2005. In 2008, Marlene Thompson, then President of the AHPA, collaborated with



The AHPA Board in Quebec City in 2015: (left to right) Nancy Ellis, Jennifer Boyle (IT), Jennifer Burt, Rashmi Mandhane, Karine Toupin-April (outgoing); Andrea Weagle, Angelo Papachristos, Sameer Chunara, Karen Gordon (outgoing), Leslie Soever (President) Missing: Raquel Sweezie, Julia Farquharson, Mandy McGlynn.

the CRA with the aim of allowing the AHPA to sponsor workshops providing educational opportunities specific to allied health professionals during the CRA ASM. The successful one-day AHPA pre-course started in 2009 and continues to grow annually.

In September 2013, the AHPA officially incorporated. Membership is still expanding, and we now boast over 140 members from coast to coast. AHPA continues to collaborate with the CRA by participating on their Scientific Committee to plan the annual conference and scientific meeting, which AHPA members attend yearly.

The AHPA is a society of health professionals who work in the field of rheumatology. Our members come from a variety of clinical and administrative settings such as hospitals, clinics, community programs, and universities. We are dedicated to improving healthcare standards for people with rheumatic disease through the promotion of education and support of research among our members.

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AHPA Past President

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador