

2015 Teacher-Educator: Dr. Andrew Thompson

1. From where do you think your passion for medical education stemmed?

I think I could probably develop a passion for almost anything that I enjoy. I have a passion for medical education because I enjoy it.

2. Your methods of teaching and conveying information are described as “fun” and “different”, often including humour and storytelling to help learners. From what or whom did you learn this approach to education, and why do you feel it is important to employ it?

It is best to think of educating students from a marketing point of view. How do you think the marketers get us to buy things? They create something that catches our interest, keeps our interest, and makes us ponder it afterwards. Think of a memorable commercial or billboard—these are often memorable because they are either sexy, controversial, or funny. In essence, the marketers are awakening our emotions while they convey their message. Teaching is no different—you are a marketer of educational information, therefore you have to package and present the information in a way that awakens the learner’s emotions. Humour is a good way to do this. Creating controversy and discussion is another. The “sexy” approach...not so good.

The other important aspect of conveying information is “less is more”. It is not important to try to teach everything all at once. Use a layered approach. Build the cognitive scaffold and then start to shape it.

3. What are your biggest pet peeves?
Inefficiency and bureaucracy.



4. What was your first thought when you learned that you would receive this award?

I felt very humbled. There are so many great rheumatology educators to choose from and I felt honoured to have been chosen for this award.

5. What was the inspiration for creating *rheuminfo.com* and *rheumtalks.com*? What is the most rewarding aspect of running the sites, and what is the most challenging aspect?

Rheuminfo.com started in 2003 in Richmond, British Columbia. I had

just started working with Dr. Kam Shojanian and Dr. Barry Koehler. I came out of my office and asked them if they had an information sheet on methotrexate. At that time they did not, so I made one for our office. I then went on to make information sheets about other medications. Then I thought, “If we do not have these in our office, then what about other rheumatologists? I should share these online via a website.” That is when *rheuminfo.com* was first born. Over the years I have learned loads about education both formally, through a Masters Degree, and informally gauging the use of information pamphlets in the clinical setting. This has changed the approach to conveying information to patients. *Rheuminfo.com* has grown beyond any of my expectations and it is now becoming more of a global resource. In January 2015 we had over 60,000 visitors to the site and the number continues to grow.

Rheumtalks.com began out of frustration with current online continuing medical education (CME). In the olden days we had these online CME programs that consisted of a one-hour video of a talking head. After five minutes I

would be bored out of my mind. Then I thought about *YouTube*. Most people can pay attention for three to five minutes to a *YouTube* video before they shut it down; I applied this philosophy to *rheumtalks.com*. Videos should be three to five minutes long. Each video is contained in a module that has a single learning objective. The users can pace themselves and do one or two modules at a time.

6. What is something unexpected that has changed about you in the past few years?

I am getting offered the senior's discounts at Shoppers and Rexall now...

7. How do you find the time to manage a full-time academic rheumatology practice and also develop all of these educational tools?

I do not find the time—I use my time to do these things because I thoroughly enjoy them. After 10 years in practice, I have finally stumbled upon my niche, where I fit best into the rheumatology community. My wife, Marlene, and our boys Callum and Duncan are also really supportive. It could also be that I am a little insane. My friends call me "100% Andy"; I am either full steam ahead or full stop. There is not much in between.

8. If you had a theme song that played whenever you enter a room full of people, what song would it be?

Don't Stop Believin', by Journey.

9. What changes to the landscape of rheumatology have you witnessed after creating these websites? What direction do you see yourself taking with the sites in the future?

This is a great question. It reminds me of that interview question, "Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?" It is not a favourite question of mine because so many opportunities present themselves and it is best not to plan too much. A better approach is to have a firm set of beliefs or principles by which you conduct yourself or your business, and then use these to guide your path. That was a long-winded answer to say that I have no idea where the sites will go in the future! This year we are moving *rheuminfo.com*

onto a mobile platform to better deliver our content in the age of smartphones and tablets.

10. If you could invent a gadget, what would it be and why would we need it?

Sorry, I would need to have you sign a non-disclosure agreement to further discuss this question.

11. What projects are you currently excited to be working on, and what projects would you like to undertake in the future?

In the future I would love to create a full-fledged electronic medical record (EMR). The challenge with existing EMRs is that they are built on old technology and the user interfaces are not optimal. That is a huge project but infinitely interesting.

I am currently excited to be working on a new project called *clinicinfo.com*. *Clinicinfo.com* is a way to help us communicate more effectively and efficiently with our patients; it functions like a private banking website that a healthcare professional can place messages on for their patient. I have been using the system since September 2013. The system is now in 12 other medical clinics and is going really well; it really improves office efficiency. We are now looking at further expansion with potential commercialization.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Fred Doris, 2015.

In a blaze of coloured pixels, Dr. Thompson received his award from Ms. Janet Yale and Dr. Cory Baillie.

NORTHERN (HIGH)LIGHTS



Photo courtesy of the CRA, 2015.

Dr. Thompson and Dr. Baillie: the future of Canadian curling!

12. If you could go bowling with any three people, dead or alive, who would you take and why?

Marlene, Callum, and Duncan—that is a no brainer. If they were not available I would want to go with Steve Jobs, Warren Buffett, and Kevin Firko.

13. If you could compete in the Olympics, which event would you participate in?

Curling—I used to be a varsity curler at Western—it is true!

14. If you could live in any other time period in history, what era would you inhabit?

The future!

15. Three things you think will become obsolete in 10 years:

Newspapers, fax machines (maybe 20 years), and credit cards (phone pay systems).

16. What do you love most about living in Ontario?

I love the social aspect of Ontarians.

17. You are handed a plane ticket to anywhere in the world. Where are you going?

Home.



Photo courtesy of the CRA, 2015.

Dr. Thompson, recipient of the 2015 Teacher-Educator Award from the CRA.

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