

Expanding Rheumatology Care in British Columbia

By Jason Kur, MD, FRCPC, ABIM

By now, many will have seen the recent release of Canada's updated census data. These data point to the fact that some of the largest population increases in recent years have been in Western Canada. Not surprisingly, the population of British Columbia (B.C.) has been growing and, so too has the population of rheumatologists in the province.

Over the past two-to-three years, we have seen recruitment successes on a few fronts. There has been a net positive migration of rheumatologists from other parts of Canada and the world to B.C. In addition we have seen the graduation and retention of several trainees from the University of British Columbia (UBC) rheumatology program.

But, the ceaseless challenge that we experience, as mimicked by many other jurisdictions, is meeting the needs of patients in all geographic regions of the province. The distribution of specialists in relation to the demand for services is a continuing struggle.

However, there have been some new, constructive developments on the rheumatology human-resources front. For instance, Chilliwack in the Fraser Valley now benefits from the rheumatologic services of Dr. Markus Klaus.

The City of Surrey, with a population that is nearing Vancouver, traditionally has not had a single full-time rheumatologist in practice. That is rapidly evolving as a combination of new graduates and established physicians are now practicing in the area. As a corollary, the rheumatologists in the Fraser Health Authority, which includes Surrey and New Westminster, are working to form a more cohesive group in their dealings with their health region.

The Mary Pack Arthritis Centre travelling consultation service continues its excellent outreach work for the more remote communities in the province.

Areas of the B.C. interior still would be considered underserved by provincial standards, as wait times there for assessments continue to be the longest in the province. In addition, there are no rheumatologists in Prince George/Northern B.C.

Fortunately, the outlook for rheumatologic patient care has improved considerably in recent years in the province of British Columbia, and we look forward to further alleviating unmet regional needs.

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