

# Tribute to Dr. Bill Bensen

By Rick Adachi, MD, FRCPC

Dr. Bill Bensen, MD, FRCPC, who passed away on March 15, 2017, was a doctor and rheumatologist who had a vision of rheumatology: physicians leading a team of allied health professionals, including nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, pharmacists and social workers, working cooperatively with The Arthritis Society and devoted to the care of those with arthritis. Bill was constantly striving to improve care through innovation. He recognized that the major limitation to care was the human-resources shortage of trained rheumatologists. As a result, he introduced the use of nursing staff to help co-manage those with inflammatory arthritis. In addition, with his son, Rob, he had integrated specialty pharmacy services into rheumatology practice to improve patient education, simplify access to therapies and ultimately, to improve patient outcomes.

Bill's father was a family doctor in Hamilton, who was struck down early in his life from complications of rheumatoid arthritis. This was Bill's inspiration for becoming a rheumatologist. Dr. Bensen was passionate about providing the best care possible for those who suffered from arthritis in Hamilton.

As an educator, Bill was a titan. Indeed, he was one of the major influences in my decision to become a rheumatologist and to stay in Hamilton. He was a knowledgeable and charismatic speaker, who could communicate equally well with the public, with medical students and residents, and with fellow physicians. Indeed, so great were his skills that he was invited to address the United Nations.

In addition, Bill recognized the complexities of medicine. He simplified problems that were complex, improving care and patient outcomes. By way of example, Bill worked with his wife, Wynn, and developed Bone Destiny, an innovative fracture-risk assessment tool, well before the World Health



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Organization (WHO) developed FRAX, their tool for the assessment of fracture risk. Bone Destiny was deemed to be one of the promising simple new tools when it was introduced at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research, the premiere international scientific meeting. Bone Destiny has since proven to be as effective in assessing fracture risk as any other tool, yet simpler to apply.

He continued to influence, not just the rheumatology community, but McMaster Medical School through his involvement with the White Coat Ceremony and the Annual Founder's Dinner. He also introduced the Joy of Rheumatology celebration to attract medical students into our specialty.

Bill was never shy with his opinions, and many of us were beneficiaries of his advice. Bill will be remembered for the significant contributions he made to the care of patients with rheumatic diseases. Certainly, we, in the rheumatology community, will endeavour to make sure that his legacy lives on.

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