

# Passing the Torch & a Presidential Address



**Joanne Homik,**  
Past-President of the CRA:

Now that there is a new President at the helm of the Canadian Rheumatology Association, I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on my time with the organization. Taking on the role of President of the CRA was not a decision I took lightly. My predecessor, Cory Baillie, had left the CRA in a stronger position compared to how he found it because of all his hard work on governance and organization structure. Having been involved in the process, however, I felt equipped to assume the role of President with a clear understanding of my role and responsibilities.

Over the two years of my term, we have seen new challenges, as well as a lot of successes. There is a growing change to the sponsorship landscape, especially where it involves continuing medical education (CME) event planning. One of the reasons we did not follow through on the meeting in Mexico was the difficulty for all our partners to secure funding due to the location of the meeting. Even our usual Canadian location choices have been scrutinized under this process. Recent transparency initiatives in Ontario and *The Globe and Mail* article on Canadian Clinical Practice Guidelines have created greater awareness at the board regarding our role in maintaining the reputation of the CRA. This applies not only to our reputation among colleagues, but also as the general public sees us. We look forward to working within this new landscape with our new and familiar industry partners to continue to support our many initiatives.

We continued to provide excellent opportunities for education and networking for our members. Our annual scientific meeting is our premiere membership event, is highly rated by our members and stakeholders, and continues to grow in quality and size year after year.

The other significant task of the board this past year has been to oversee the change in organizational leadership. Our much beloved CEO, Christine Charnock, resigned from her position in May 2017. This necessitated not only a search for a replacement but a re-examination of our goals and priorities, so that we could identify the right individual for the position. Ahmad brings a fresh perspective and skill set to the role, and we are all excited to work with him.

It has been my honour to represent the membership as President of the Board over the last two years. I recognize that I am passing on to the new President, Vandana Ahluwalia, an organization that is still in transition, but I have full confidence in her ability to take the torch and run with it!

*Joanne Homik, MD, MSc, FRCPC*  
Past-President,  
Canadian Rheumatology Association  
Associate Professor of Medicine,  
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**Vandana Ahluwalia,**  
President of the CRA:

Thank you, Joanne. Your work over the past two years at the CRA has developed a great foundation for the future of this organization.

The CRA's mission priorities include optimal care, workforce planning and management, building connections, research, stakeholder engagement and organizational viability. Annually, the CRA board sets the strategic priorities that reflect the membership's needs. This year, the three priorities that we will be focusing on are understanding rheumatology manpower needs; strengthening relationships with our major stakeholders; and ensuring organizational viability.

Based on our membership engagement surveys, we were tasked to understand the regional differences in rheumatology manpower and opportunities for employment. Our summer studentship program, reports that 16% of those medical students that were exposed to rheumatology, pursued rheumatology as a career choice. For this year, in order to continue to build on this success, in addition to industry support, we have secured funding for the research stream of this program from the government of Canada through the Canada Summer Jobs program. Our new HR chair and their committee's mandate will be to work on this priority over the next year.

Our organization continues to find ways to align our work with other major stakeholders, such as the AHPA, the AAC and The Arthritis Society (TAS). Furthermore, we need to understand how our expertise can help support other national organizations such as the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA) in this era of expanding therapeutics and escalating costs.

This is the year that the CRA takes full control over the board of the *Journal of Rheumatology*. We are excited about this new ownership opportunity which not only can help fund the activities of this organization but raises the profile of the association on the world stage. The sponsorship landscape is changing and we need to diversify our funding support. We are exploring innovative ways to ensure that we will have the support for all the ongoing and important activities of this organization in the future.

I will be the third female president in more than 70 years of this organization's existence. Our demographics are changing and more women are entering medicine. Our membership reflects this, with women accounting for 56% and men representing 44%. The learning and leadership styles of women will be different from their male counterparts. This needs to be taken into consideration when creating activities for our membership and programmes for leadership development.

Looking ahead, I am excited to work with our members, staff, partners and supporters to continue building on our incredible successes. I would like to help build an organization that is adaptable and ready to take on the challenges of the future, and I hope to anticipate and serve the evolving needs of our membership.

*Vandana Ahluwalia, MD, FRCPC*  
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Former Corporate Chief of Rheumatology,  
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