

Passing the Torch

Vandana Ahluwalia
Past-President of the CRA



Two years ago, I took on the role of the President of the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA), and it has been a very rewarding experience. I learned that good things happen when dedicated people work together towards a shared goal. Our volunteer members have accomplished a lot because of their strong professional relationships with one another.

Just before the start of my tenure, our new CEO, Ahmad Zbib, joined our team. In partnership with the board, committee volunteers, and dedicated staff, he has been focused on providing value for all our members, and continually striving towards improving our organization.

I consider myself privileged and proud to have led the final stages of what I believe has been a transformational journey of the CRA. This started several years ago, with the introduction of a new governance model. This journey required a considerable amount of time, energy and commitment. During the last two years we focused on strategic alignment of our resources, as well as planning for a bright and sustainable future. This resulted in a newly minted strategic plan which will set the stage for the next three-to-five years and help us deliver measurable impact. Furthermore, our work on identifying a new organizational structure, through which we can continue to serve our members and the public, will help future-proof our organization.

The *Journal of Rheumatology* has nestled into its home at the CRA very nicely. Our relationship is maturing, built on mutual respect, and is strengthened by open communication. The *Journal* continues to publish internationally renowned articles in rheumatology research. It is expanding globally through its “clinical highlights” publication to inform and educate rheumatologists around the world.

Our flagship activity, the Annual Scientific Meeting, was highly attended in beautiful Victoria, B.C. This year, we featured a new review course for general rheumatologists which was very well received. We also hosted our inaugural Canadian Arthritis Research Conference. This conference brought together the Arthritis Society, CIHR-IMHA, and the CRA to support research that seeks to improve the lives of people with arthritis and rheumatic diseases.

During my tenure at the CRA, I have learned that leadership is not an innate trait, but a skill that can be taught. It is important that we don't forget to nurture those with the potential and motivation to become future leaders of this organization. It has been my honour to work with such an enthusiastic and dedicated Board of Directors who have made my job a pleasure. I am excited to pass the torch to Evelyn Sutton, our incoming president, who will lead us and celebrate with us during our upcoming 75th anniversary in 2021.

Vandana Ahluwalia, MD, FRCPC, Past-President, CRA



Presidential Address

Evelyn Sutton
President of the CRA



This past April, my husband and I stood witness to the marriage of a young couple. They exchanged vows on the deck of a deserted marina where there was not a single boat moored. They, the justice of the peace and we made the maximum of five people in a gathering. I used my cell-phone to record a video of the event and

later, with the help of an individual more tech savvy than myself, uploaded it for their parents and guests to view from around the world. We could not hug the bride or the groom nor go out for a celebratory dinner together so we drove down the coast in our separate vehicles and found a place to take a few more pictures of the happy couple with coastal views in the background. The joy emanating from the young couple was contagious and we could not stop smiling.

“Contagious” is either a poor or an appropriate choice of word right now. Everyone's lives have been affected to varying degrees by a virus we were aware of in February in Victoria at our Annual Scientific Meeting, but whose impact was yet to be felt around the world. I recall hearing attendees looking forward to seeing one another at their upcoming regional meetings or at EULAR, all of course now cancelled.

Like the young couple who married yesterday, we are all being challenged to identify what is truly of importance to us. They did not need the big party, decorations or flowers. They did need the promise that each would be there for the other no matter what the future holds.

The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) is also identifying what is of importance to members including but not limited to: updates on best practices for our patients on biologics, advocacy for evidence-based prescribing of hydroxychloroquine, pressure on government and suppliers to ensure our patients are not left without medication, and advice on assessing patients remotely. Your committees have been busy on your behalf, and I thank them all. A special shout out to Rosie Scuccimarri and the Therapeutics Committee, Carter Thorne for his tireless and tenacious advocacy on hydroxychloroquine, Janet Pope for her webinars and to Ahmad Zbib and the wonderful CRA staff.

On a personal level, I hope you, your families and loved ones are well. I count myself fortunate to be a member of this national network of wonderful, caring professionals, and I have never regretted making the choice to belong to this wonderful organization. I promise you, no matter what the future holds, the CRA will continue to work with and for you. I do hope we can see each other in Quebec City in February 2021, but if not, we will find a way to stay connected. Best wishes to you all. Sincerely,

Evelyn Sutton, MD, FRCPC
President, CRA