

# The CRA's 2021 Distinguished Teacher-Educator: Dr. Elaine Yacyshyn

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

I was in the middle of clinic with a resident and felt that it was amazing to be teaching when I received the notification. I was deeply honoured to receive this award. It was a true privilege to be recognized by my peers. I was also very thankful to those who nominated me, and to the many residents and fellows who I have worked with, as well as my colleagues locally and nationally.

Can you recall a teacher in your own past who inspired your direction into education?

I have been very fortunate to have had great teachers who both inspired and encouraged me to become a clinician educator. My most amazing teachers stand out because of the personal connection they made with learners. I recall my kindergarten teacher, who was the kindest woman, and shared her cookies at recess. Numerous teachers through junior high and high school spent time fostering curiosity in their subject areas. At university, a chemistry professor was on stage to congratulate me at convocation. I also recall many gifted teachers in rheumatology who motivated me to do my best and spent time talking with me and guiding me to reach my fullest potential.

I have also been inspired by my learners who ask challenging questions, and encourage me to work with them on questions, and to push the envelope.

It was past and present teachers who showed kindness, generosity and wisdom and helped me focus on education in medicine.

What do you believe are the qualities of a good educator?

My philosophy is to ensure that all learners develop knowledge, skills, and competency in medicine.

My main method of instruction is context-based learning. I make use of opportunities to observe and interact, to provide timely feedback, and to motivate for learning. Students learn best as active learners. I see the role of a teacher as a facilitator and mentor, not a supplier of knowledge. I try to understand my students' knowledge and, through interaction, develop weaknesses into strengths.



I also believe in "physicianship" (Crueess et al), which affirms that physicians have roles as healers, professionals, and teachers who can integrate scientific and humanistic views of medicine.<sup>1</sup>

Learners need regular assessments and feedback. My aim has been to teach and mentor to the best of my ability. I believe it is important for me to continue to challenge myself, and I seek out opportunities to become a better teacher.

As a rheumatology program director at the University of Alberta, what were some of the opportunities and challenges you faced?

I was very fortunate to have been the rheumatology program director at the University of Alberta (UofA). This role enabled me to pursue my role as a clinician-educator.

I had the opportunity to optimize the rheumatology residency program at the UofA. I had the support of colleagues who were equally passionate about education and helped me to achieve these goals. As a program director I was able to meet many of my Canadian counterparts. I was inspired and encouraged by my colleagues and was able to pursue educational efforts at a national level. The opportunity to network with many amazing colleagues has been very rewarding and enjoyable.

It was always a challenge to choose our residents for the program, among all the great applicants. The qualifications of our learners continue to impress me. It has been gratifying to work with our residents and see them become amazing colleagues in a very short time.

You've also been an examiner for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) Rheumatology Examination and examination chair for two terms. Currently you are a member of the RCPSC Examination Committee, which oversees all Royal College examinations.

Are you working on any exciting changes right now that you can share?

These are unprecedented times at the Royal College (RC) as we are in the midst of the pandemic. It has been impressive to see everyone work together to maintain the

high standards of evaluations and concern for learners. Over the last year, I have transitioned from Rheumatology Examination Chair to the Royal College Examination Committee. The Royal College examination boards continue to work hard to prepare valid tools to assess competency in a safe manner.

**As a respected teacher-educator, what would your advice be to a prospective rheumatologist?**

If you are interested in a career that provides the opportunity to see amazing patients, perform high-level research, and be able to teach fantastic learners, you should consider rheumatology! We are fortunate to have such rewarding careers.

**How many cups of coffee does it take to make a productive day?**

Most people who know me are aware that I do not drink coffee. I like herbal tea, but my guilty pleasure is an almond milk chai tea.

**What is a hidden talent of yours that not many people know about?**

I really enjoy playing the piano; I used to play when I was a child. I started taking lessons again a few years ago, and love to play Chopin. I have also learnt from my piano teacher how patient one needs to be as a teacher!



Dr. Yacyshyn receiving the CRA Distinguished Teacher-Educator Award during the virtual gala in February.

**What would you be if you weren't a rheumatologist?**

I think I would be a teacher and, like my kindergarten teacher, hand out Peak Freen cookies!

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Reference:

1. Cruess RL, et al. Reframing medical education to support professional identity formation. *Acad Med.* 2014; 89(11):1446-51.

## Looking Ahead Boldly

By Trish Barbato, President and CEO, Arthritis Society

**A**s the Arthritis Society heads into a new fiscal year, we're excited about what lies ahead.

While the year was difficult for us and for so many people we support, it pushed us to innovate and change the way we do our work.

The year had many bright spots. Thanks to our generous donors, we were able to fund four additional research projects in March, bringing our investment last year to almost \$4 million.

Close to two million people visited our website for credible and timely information to help them manage the disease. Our pages about COVID-19, which are updated regularly with new information, such as the CRA's vaccine decision aid, continue to be accessed frequently.

We reached 50,000 people from across the country

through our monthly Arthritis Talks webinars. We encourage you to share information about upcoming Arthritis Talks with your patients, with topics including how to reduce flares, joint surgery 101, nutrition, physical activity and what research is revealing about medical cannabis. They are hosted in both English and French and all past webinars are available for viewing at [arthritis.ca](http://arthritis.ca).

As we look to the year ahead, we're ramping up our efforts to think and act innovatively. We've re-launched our Strategic Plan, with goals to fund more research and reach more people than we ever have before.

We're thinking boldly, because we have to be bold, to get arthritis and the people living with it the attention they deserve. Thank you for partnering with us in that effort.

