

Report from the ORA

By Philip A. Baer, MDCM, FRCPC, FACR, ORA President

"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

– Unofficial motto of the US Postal Service

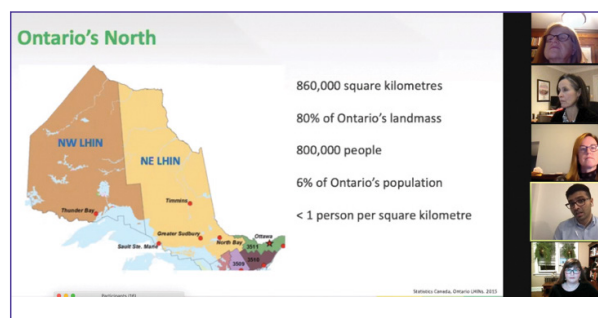
No pandemic can stop the activities of the Ontario Rheumatology Association either, as we have proven over the past year. Our leadership group and our committees have met exclusively via Zoom since March 2020, but the work continues to get done and our influence grows perceptibly.

We held a very successful virtual Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) in late May 2021. I was on-site for the duration at the state-of-the-art bbBlanc studios just north of Toronto, with my co-host Dr. Janet Pope participating virtually from London. Drs. Felix Leung, Ashley Sterrett and Deb Levy hosted a session each, giving Janet and myself a welcome break, and providing my only in-person close encounters with fellow rheumatologists in the past year. Our star-studded roster of speakers included Drs. Joseph Smolen, Maya Buch, Michelle Petri, Jeffrey Curtis, Christopher Ritchlin, Robert Inman, Shahin Jamal, Robert Bell and Jason Lee.

We also ran two ORA Town Halls in September 2021. The first updated members on the evolving pandemic situation, featuring the ORA's go-to infectious diseases expert, Dr. Zain Chagla, speaking on vaccine efficacy, third doses and variants. The second introduced the SADIE online portal, to which all requests for public funding of exceptional access drugs in Ontario will be directed as of January 2022, when the Ministry of Health "axes the fax." These events are recorded and archived on the ORA website www.ontariorheum.ca (members-only portion), where we also house links to multiple practice-related and COVID-19 resources, and an archive of all ORA e-blasts to members.

Meanwhile, all ORA committees continue to persevere and deal with their mandates. Drug shortages, biosimilar transitioning, virtual medicine, mentoring of early career rheumatologists, and rheumatologist shortages remain key areas of focus. The Informatics Committee led by Dr. Tom Appleton continues work on the ORDER project, aiming to create a dashboard for a rheumatology electronic medical record (EMR), which will allow participants to visualize their individual practice benchmarks, and compare themselves to the aggregate of participating rheumatologists within the province. The ultimate goal remains to develop an enhanced EMR user experience, while improving patient outcomes in a measurable fashion.

Our Northern Ontario Committee, chaired by Dr. Sahil Koppikar, is actively developing a funded model of rheu-



matology care to enhance access, integrating rheumatologists and arthritis health professionals (AHPs). Indigenous cultural sensitivity training, pioneered by the CRA, will be mandatory for participants. We are also working to address rheumatology shortages in Eastern Ontario.

Dr. Jane Purvis, the ORA's dynamo, has revitalized our Government Affairs Committee. We are engaged in further training in advocacy for the committee members. In partnership with the Ontario Medical Association (OMA), where Jane and several ORA members hold key positions, we have already been successful in establishing fee parity between in-person and virtual medicine visits, extending virtual medicine fee codes to September 2022, and obviating the need for our members to provide patients with letters certifying that they qualify for third COVID vaccine doses.

The successes of the ORA would not be possible without our hard-working Executive Director, Sandy Kennedy, as well as our numerous committee members and our engaged general membership. Dr. Nikhil Chopra, our long-time Treasurer, has provided steadfast guidance as we navigate a challenging financial environment. We also continue to work smoothly in concert with Drs. Ahmad Zbib and Evelyn Sutton and the CRA secretariat to share learnings and enhance the activities of our overlapping organizations.

Going forward, we look forward to a successful 2022 ASM in late May, format to be determined. My term as ORA President will conclude there, and Dr. Felix Leung will take over from me and guide the ORA to future successes.

There are always opportunities for ORA members to participate in ORA activities and committees. Check out our website at www.ontariorheum.ca for more information.

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