

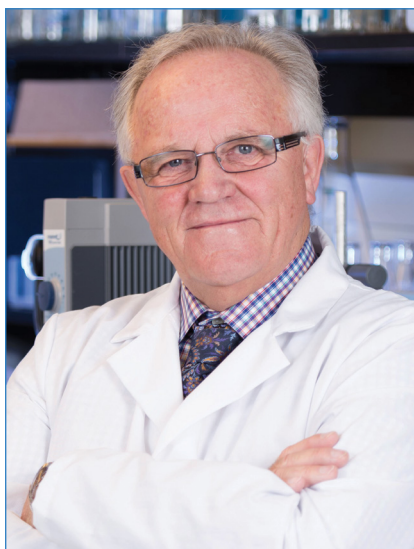
# Reflections on Retirement

By Marvin J. Fritzler, PhD, MD

I recently retired from the University of Calgary after 50 years in academia. Retirement has been a time for reflection and “post-mortem” evaluations. In considering the many people that impacted my formative years and introduced me to academic rheumatology, I remember with gratitude the wisdom and encouragement of Ian Watson, Bob Church, Doug Kinsella, Phil Gofton, Manfred Harth, Henri Menard, Dave Bell, Earl Decoteau and Dave Hawkins (a legend in his own time). Since I didn’t set goals or have a mission statement for my academic career, I have no checklist that reassures me that I accomplished anything. I recently started to clean out my university office, a physical and mental purging of momentous proportions. I amassed hundreds of books and thousands of research files and notebooks that included projects that I thought would be important some day: 99.9% have been thrown away! I reflected on this in a recent article I co-authored: Autoantibody Discovery, Assay Development and Adoption: Death Valley, the Sea of Survival and Beyond.<sup>1</sup> Sure, there are research files that are still interesting to me, but I’ll bet not to you. I doubt that anyone will ask me “what happened to your research on “LINES” (long-interspersed nuclear elements), anti-sense ERCC1, or (my favorite) kappaphredon (aka ‘dimethylchickenwire’)?”

Because it provides a tincture of healing, there are two things I didn’t throw away. First is a collection of letters, cards and emails from former patients or their family members who thanked me for the clinical care I provided. The second is a plaque that my children gave me quoting Albert Einstein: “If we knew what it is we were doing, it wouldn’t be called research.” The pandemic has allowed ample time for reflection on scientific research. An important “lesson” came from a colleague while several of us were embroiled in an email debate about certain published COVID-19 data. He said, “It is important to remember that science is provisional”; or, as I often said, “the data never speak for themselves, they have to be interpreted.” Hence, the oft used aphorism today “we follow the science” bears witness that many people do not understand science.

Over my career I had the fortune to serve on numerous agencies, boards, consultancies, and committees. Some



continue, some do not. I think the most valuable committees were those that could disband having accomplished what they set out to do. Many others persist in peeling the proverbial onion.

What have I learned, and what are my take-home messages? First a paradox, progress is only seen by looking in the rear-view mirror. The bugs on the windshield only serve as a distraction from the scenery and the dashboard is only a reference for that specific moment. Second, what is intuitive (particularly in academia) rarely happens. Third, the rumours (today on social and even mass media) are rarely true or accurate.

What are my concerns? 1) our young academics are overburdened with legalistic, risk-averse institutions that are swamping them with minutiae; 2) peer review is on the cusp of failure (it has become “political review”) and if it continues its current trend, it will take science to irrelevance (try following it then); 3) what will post-pandemic health care or academic research look like?

I leave these concerns in the hands of a very capable new generation who I am confident will effect needed course corrections. They are much brighter and more dedicated to equitable, diverse, and inclusive patient care and research than I was when I started. Through all of this, the Canadian Rheumatology Association has been, and I expect will continue to be, a vibrant and reassuring anchor of leadership and collegiality. I consider it an honour to be one of you.

#### References:

1. Fritzler MJ, Choi MY, Satoh M, et al. Autoantibody Discovery, Assay Development and Adoption: Death Valley, the Sea of Survival and Beyond. *Front Immunol.* 2021;12. doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2021.679613.

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