

Canadian Heroes in Rheumatology: Mary Pack

By Kam Shojania, MD, FRCPC

Mary Pack's first exposure to arthritis was when she worked as a homeschool teacher in British Columbia (BC) in the 1940s. She taught children who were too disabled to go to school, and many of her students had long-term joint damage due to juvenile arthritis. Mary's mother also had severe arthritis. She was moved by the suffering of people with arthritis and, in 1944, began a 5-year advocacy mission for research into the cause and treatment of arthritis. She was determined to help her students and all people with arthritis.

Using her considerable charisma and intelligence, she pulled together a dedicated group of physicians, allied healthcare providers and patients to lobby the government for support. She was the founder of the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society's (CARS — now the Arthritis Society) first Division in 1948 in BC, and was a key fundraiser and organizer of the Vancouver Arthritis Centre (built in 1969 and renamed the Mary Pack Arthritis Centre in 1994). In 1949, the BC Ministry of Health provided CARS a \$25,000 grant to deliver services to people with arthritis in BC. Physiotherapists were hired and equipment was purchased for mobile units to bring care to people with arthritis at home. Mary helped institute a mobile service where rheumatologists and occupational therapists would drive or fly to distant communities to provide care. By the end of 1973, the Division had 65 professional staff. Mary's legacy lives on as the Mary Pack Arthritis Program continues to provide specialized services for people with arthritis in



Vancouver, Victoria, Penticton, Cranbrook and 38 small towns across British Columbia. The program also hosts quaternary clinics for rare rheumatic diseases, combined clinics and a young adult transition clinic.

In 1974, Mary Pack published "Never Surrender," a passionate story of the birth and development of the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society, ending with the construction of our unique Arthritis Centre in Vancouver. Typically for Mary, the profits from the sale of this book were invested back into arthritis research.

A tribute to Mary Pack was written by Harold S. Robinson, Head of Rheumatology, in the 1970s:

"This edifice she did build so well moved on toward the third millennium, never completely constant, always demanding renewal and re-dedication of purpose; buffeted by the winds of change in people, governments and educational institutions; unchanging however, in its commitment to people afflicted with rheumatic disease."

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Mary's handprints can be seen in the concrete foundation of her building. Mary truly has left her mark on arthritis care in BC and in Canada. She is a rheumatology hero.

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