

Rising Star: Dr. Arielle Mendel

"IT'S UP TO YOU. . . to become a rheumatologist. . . or get them to us!!!" This mantra was recited after every rheumatology lecture taught by Drs. Andy Thompson, Gina and Sherry Rohekar, Janet Pope, and Nicole Le Riche, during my first semester of medical school more than fourteen years ago. After some weeks of this exercise, I began to feel heaviness and pain in my right arm and hand every evening when I returned home from class. I was sure that my right hand was swollen compared to my left. I could see veins popping out! Convinced that I had rheumatoid arthritis, or worse — fibromyalgia!

— I went to an urgent care clinic. Of course, the doctor told me there was nothing wrong with my arm or hand. It took a few more weeks for me to be convinced, but my mysterious arm pain gradually disappeared (I also started carrying my bag on the other shoulder). Believe it or not, I emerged from my medical student syndrome (+/- being brainwashed per the above) SOLD on rheumatology! When I applied to the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) summer studentship, I was over the moon when Dr. Lori Albert had a spot for me in her clinic. With this and each additional passing observership and elective, I became more interested in rheumatology, and, thanks to my PGY1 training at Sunnybrook (and Dr. Shirley Lake), the field of quality and patient safety.

During my rheumatology residency at McGill, I realized that I loved treating severe systemic rheumatic diseases, such as lupus and vasculitis (fortunately, this time, without developing a psychosomatic malar rash or foot drop). I returned to Toronto to do a fellowship in vasculitis and a Masters in Quality Improvement and Patient Safety. I was fortunate to be funded by The Arthritis Society and the *Association des Médecins Rhumatologues du Québec* for my project to improve timely glucocorticoid tapering in vasculitis. I had truly exceptional vas-



culitis training with Drs. Christian Pagnoux and Simon Carette, and I am indebted to them for their clinical wisdom and encouragement through my projects.

The first few months of the pandemic marked the end of my fellowship and the start of my assistant professor position at McGill University. The teak furniture I inherited from my parents (z"l) had now travelled with me from Montreal→London→Montreal→London→Toronto→Montreal→Toronto→Montreal. I set to work living up to the job description in my McGill faculty appointment letter: clinician in

the lupus and vasculitis clinic, quality lead in my division, and . . . scientist. Since then, with immense help from my mentors, I am grateful to have obtained a research salary award from the *Fonds de Recherche Québec Santé (FRQS)* and start-up funds from CIORA to study the safety and effectiveness of rituximab biosimilars in ANCA-associated vasculitis, along with my outstanding vasculitis colleagues across Canada. I would like to thank my mentors (Drs. Sasha Bernatsky, Évelyne Vinet, Inés Colmegna, Paul Fortin, Christian Pagnoux), my first research role model Dr. Gillian Hawker, and the wonderful rheumatology research stars I look up to from my own "generation" (Drs. Nancy Maltez, May Choi, Sabrina Hoa, Lauren King, Valérie Leclair). Surrounded by my loving family, friends, and mentors, I look forward to helping my patients and collaborating with the incredible clinicians and scientists in my life.

*Arielle Mendel, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Assistant Professor,
Department of Medicine,
Divisions of Rheumatology and
Experimental Medicine
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec*