

# Updates from the U of T Division of Rheumatology

By Heather McDonald-Blumer, MD, FRCPC, MSc (HPTE)

The Division of Rheumatology at the University of Toronto has undergone some major changes over the last few years. It has long been said “There is nothing permanent, except change.” We are proof of this.

Dr. Murray Urowitz retired from having been a pillar of the division, a highly recognized teacher and a world-renowned lupus researcher. Dr. Urowitz led the Toronto Lupus Program for more than 50 years. Murray’s legacy is honoured through the Dr. Murray B. Urowitz Chair in Lupus Research, with Dr. Zahi Touma being the inaugural recipient. Zahi is now the Director of the lupus program, continuing to combine optimal lupus care with an articulate research agenda. Zahi and the team are ably supported by our newest recruit at Toronto Western Hospital, Dr. Laura Whittall Garcia, a new Clinician Investigator.

Dr. Simon Carette has also retired recently. A true renaissance man when it comes to rheumatology, Simon was a beloved teacher, an insightful investigator – collaborator and a skilled administrator across varying time points in his career. His expertise in vasculitis is missed, most notably by his colleague, Dr. Christian Pagnoux, who runs our vasculitis program at Mount Sinai Hospital (the workload is overwhelming). Dr. Medha Soowamber is a newly appointed Clinician Teacher, with additional expertise in vasculitis, and focuses on our giant cell arteritis (GCA) rapid access program. Dr. Megan Himmel, as a Clinician Teacher at Toronto Western, took over Dr. Carette’s general rheumatology practice and now provides exemplary care for patients with vasculitis at the Western, rounding out the divisional expertise in this niche.

Drs. Edward Keystone and Claire Bombardier retired in 2022, leaving a large hole. Their legacies in the field of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) cannot be overstated. A Chair has been posted at the University of Toronto to recruit a worthy candidate to support and grow our RA program and to maintain their legacies.

Dr. Rachel Shupak and Dr. Louise Perlin have retired from St. Michael’s Hospital. Their presence is missed by their patients, colleagues and, perhaps most of all, by our trainees. Rachel and Louise were superb teachers and educators of the highest magnitude. While their clinical practises have been absorbed by many, the wisdom they

brought to rheumatology and the passion they infused into their craft remains aspirational for trainees and other faculty alike.

Dr. Dafna Gladman retired from clinical practice at the end of 2024 and was duly celebrated. Dafna, like her friend and colleague Murray Urowitz, has left a huge footprint in the world of lupus. Dafna is equally recognized as an expert in psoriatic arthritis clinical care and research. While Dafna will continue her research activities, Dr. Vinod Chandran, who was recruited over a decade ago to work with Dafna, now leads the Psoriatic Arthritis Program. Recently, our division was fortunate to recruit Dr. Denis Poddubnyy from Germany. Denis is an internationally recognized investigator with expertise in imaging within the spondyloarthropathies.

Dr. Mary Bell has announced her retirement starting July 2025. Mary has been a pillar of clinical care and patient-focused research during her career as a Clinician Investigator at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. She has mentored the team at Sunnybrook in an exemplary manner and has extended her wisdom across our division, supporting many faculty members and learners as they worked to define their career goals and pathways. While their clinical work will have a different focus, Sunnybrook has just welcomed Dr. Timothy Kwok as a Clinician Investigator, following in Dr. Bell’s footsteps.

So many changes across the University of Toronto, Division of Rheumatology . . . While we wish all our senior rheumatologists the very best in their new endeavours, we will miss them tremendously. Indeed, “change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future” (John F. Kennedy). Our division is grateful to all of those who have shaped our past and set the stage for success going forward. We are so fortunate that we have been able to welcome new colleagues to help maintain our divisional commitment to excellence in patient care, teaching, and research.

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