

Awards

By Philip A. Baer, MDCM, FRCPC, FACR

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."

-Maya Angelou

In the past year, I have had the pleasure to nominate a colleague, Dr. Dana Jerome, for two rheumatology awards and seen her win both, as the 2025 CRA Distinguished Teacher-Educator and the 2025 Ontario Rheumatology Association Rheumatologist of the Year (ROTY). As I told Dana when I presented her with the ORA award, her success has everything to do with the qualities she has demonstrated throughout her exemplary career and very little to do with any prowess I may have as a nominator.

Interestingly, I have been involved in the awards and recognition processes at the CRA, the ORA and the Ontario Medical Association (OMA). At the CRA, I was appointed to the Nominations Committee when Carter Thorne was the chair. I attended my first meeting on short notice. As it immediately preceded a dinner continuing medical education (CME) event I was attending, I took the audio call (pre-ZOOM) in a service closet at the restaurant. The quality of my participation improved thereafter, and I was pleased to champion the creation of the CRA Master Award during my time on the committee. The CRA now boasts 3 Distinguished and 2 Early Career Awards, a new for 2026 CRA Leadership Impact award, as well as the CRA Master and Practice Reflection Awards. Some may worry that having more awards dilutes the value ascribed to them, but with so many members deserving to be recognized, I would argue that there are never enough awards to go around for those who have earned consideration for them.

At the ORA, I have served on the Nominations Committee as a Past-President for several years. In addition to our ROTY award, we now have an Early Career Rheumatologist Award and several ORA Distinguished Member Awards given out annually. The more, the better.

The OMA has the greatest number of awards and award categories. Amidst the tumult of the pandemic and all of the issues facing provincial health care systems, I noticed in 2023 that the OMA had not handed out any of its usual awards. Our then OMA President Andrew Park was advertising that any member could book a 15-minute online video "Conversation with Andrew", so I booked one and brought up the absence of awards. Soon after, The OMA Awards and Recognition Committee was reestablished, and I was successful in my application to become a committee member. We have been very busy

revitalizing and consolidating the awards under a modernized framework, trying to increase engagement, honour winners in a personalized manner, and increase transparency and objectivity in selecting our winners.

It is not an easy process. If awards come with a monetary prize or offer recipients an exemption from paying annual association fees, the financial cost can be significant, and the number of awards of this type may need to be restricted. If association membership is not mandatory, we can find that worthy nominees are not members and, therefore, may be ineligible to be prize recipients. Conferring an award also engenders some reputational risk for the organization, as controversies involving several Order of Canada recipients have demonstrated. It is becoming more common to scan social media to ensure that the values of the award winners align with those of the organization. The public records of the relevant medical regulatory colleges may also be checked — anyone can have complaints registered about clinical issues, but those alleging problematic behaviours are more contentious. Medical politics can be heated, and where one draws the line between fervent advocacy and unreasonable criticism of the organization is often debated at award decision meetings.

Even with an expansion of award offerings, there are many peers we may wish to recognize for their day-to-day work improving the lives of patients, assisting their colleagues in the health professions, and fostering health system change. Informal recognition, through laudatory emails, mentions in organizational newsletters, or "Recognize a Colleague" systems are all important tools in combatting burnout and making people feel valued. The Ontario medical regulator (CPSO) home page offers the option to "compliment a physician"; one hopes it is used occasionally, rather than the link to complain about a physician on the same page.

There remains work to do as well to improve gender equity in awards. A 2024 letter in *Annals of Rheumatic Diseases*¹ highlighted the function of professional awards "in recognising exemplary individuals who uphold the values and objectives cherished by award-granting institutions... Under certain conditions, awards can galvanise motivation and amplify performance." The authors then analyzed

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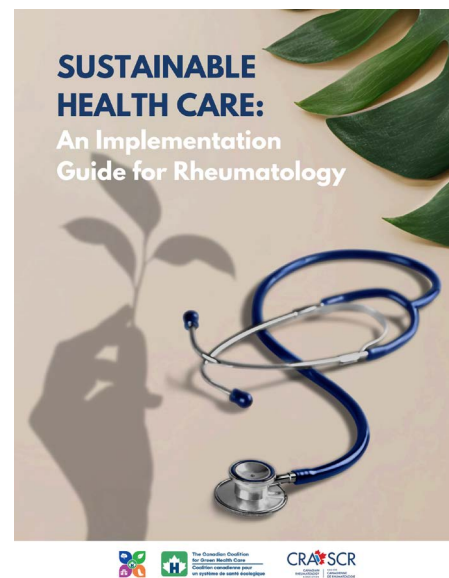
Sustainable Health Care: An Implementation Guide for Rheumatology



The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) is proud to present the new planetary health toolkit for rheumatology. ***Sustainable Health Care: An Implementation Guide for Rheumatology*** is designed to spread awareness and help rheumatology professionals incorporate planetary health principles into their practice spaces.

Building on work done by the Ontario Rheumatology Association (ORA), which created the world's first rheumatology sustainability toolkit, the CRA Planetary Health Taskforce developed a bilingual toolkit to be shared more widely among the national rheumatology community for feedback and ideas.

"We created an easy-to-use guide and it's all about promoting high value patient care, which typically results in cost savings to clinics and also has a positive environmental impact," says CRA Vice-President Dr. Stephanie Tom, Chair of the Planetary Health Task Force.



Toolkit Highlights

Awareness: Learn about the health impacts caused by the changing climate, and how to mitigate them.

Practical Steps: Detailed guidance on how to make your practice more sustainable.

Bilingual Resource: Available in both English and French to cater to the national rheumatology community.

Collaborative Effort: Developed with input from leading experts in rheumatology and sustainability.

Thank you to the CRA Planetary Health Task Force members, Drs. Stephanie Tom (Chair), Philip Baer, Claire Barber, Sasha Bernatsky, Molly Dushnicky, Beth Hazel and Fergus To.

The Planetary Health Task Force looks forward to engaging and supporting members in greening their workplaces. If you have any questions, feedback, or ideas, please email info@rheum.ca.

View the toolkit here:



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data on recipients of rheumatology awards from six major international bodies between 1972 and 2023, including ACR and EULAR. The CRA was not included. The ACR gave out two-thirds of all awards. EULAR had the highest gender parity with 31% female recipients. The gender gap has narrowed considerably, with only 11.6% female winners pre-1990 versus 36.2% since 2021. Recommendations included diversifying selection committees of award-granting institutions, advertising awards more widely, and en-

hancing transparency in the award nomination and selection processes. From my vantage point, these changes are well underway at the OMA, ORA and CRA.

Reference:

1. Roy D, Andreoli L, Ovseiko PV, et al. *Ann Rheum Dis*. 2024;83:958–959. doi:10.1136/ard-2024-225670

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