

## B.C. Society of Rheumatologists (BCSR) – Update from the Pacific

By Jason Kur, MD, FRCPC

### Political Climate

The healthcare landscape in British Columbia (BC) has shifted significantly over the past year. Although the NDP government remains in office, it now faces a much tighter fiscal environment. Funding shortfalls and shrinking budgets have affected many areas of healthcare across the province. As a result, negotiations related to specialist waitlist management have stalled, and the expansion of specialist team care programs has slowed. Despite these challenges, there have been a few positive developments worth highlighting.

### Corridors of Care

Dr. Brent Ohata is collaborating with the “Provincial Pathways Program” to establish “Corridors of Care.” Pathways is an online resource that provides physicians and their teams with quick access to accurate referral information, including current wait times and specialists’ areas of expertise. The “Corridors of Care” initiative aims to improve access to rheumatology in remote BC communities by connecting them through Pathways to rheumatologists with shorter wait times.

### Complex Care Codes

For over a decade, BC rheumatologists have been able to use a time-based complex consult code to support patients with multisystem diseases. This code recognizes the additional time and planning required for these complex initial consultations. Following a successful disparity award in 2020, the BC Society of Rheumatologists (BCSR) is now preparing to introduce two new complex follow-up codes; one time-based and the other focused on multi-organ disease. These are now close to implementation.

The purpose of these new codes is multifaceted. A key goal is to help address gender pay disparities in rheumatology. Studies show that female physicians often spend more time with complex patients yet earn less for the same hours worked. These new codes are a small but important step toward recognizing that additional effort.

In addition, the multi-organ disease follow-up code is intended to support sub-specialty rheumatology clinics, where physicians manage particularly complex patients and often face financial limitations. Together, these new



Dr. John Esdaile and distinguished lecturer Dr. Neda Amiri.

billing codes are designed to strengthen care for BC’s most vulnerable patients.

### Recruitment and Retention

Many regions in BC continue to struggle with shortages of specialist physicians. Reports of emergency department closures in small communities and hospital-based specialist resignations are becoming increasingly common. In community rheumatology, significant service gaps persist, particularly in Northern BC and parts of the Interior, such as Kamloops. In contrast, Vancouver and Victoria currently have adequate rheumatology coverage.

This year, BC hosted two major rheumatology meetings:

- The Western Alliance of Rheumatology (WAR) meeting in Kelowna (May)
- The 20th annual BC Rheumatology Invitational Educational Series (BRIESE) Conference in Vancouver (November)

WAR had great representation from across the West, including a large contingent from Saskatchewan this year. The BRIESE Conference was also another great success, featuring insightful presentations from: Dr. Neda Amiri (UBC), Dr. Jonathan Chan (UBC), Dr. Ann Clarke (University of Calgary), Dr. Narsis Daftarian (Arthritis Research Canada), and Dr. Anisha Dua (Northwestern University School of Medicine).

### Honouring Our Colleagues

As we reflect on the year, we also wish to recognize a member of the BC rheumatology community who has recently retired.

Dr. Jolanda Cibere has made immeasurable contributions to UBC Rheumatology and Arthritis Research Canada. She has been a leader in osteoarthritis care and a champion for both excellence in research and compassionate teaching. Many of us have benefited greatly from her dedication and expertise.

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Attendees at the Western Alliance of Rheumatology Meeting in Kelowna, BC, May 2025.

## The AMRQ: A Year of Consolidation and Momentum for the Future

By Hugues Allard-Chamard, MD, PhD, FRCPC

The Association des médecins rhumatologues du Québec (AMRQ), in collaboration with the Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec (FMSQ), has seen negotiations with provincial authorities intensify in recent months. Despite significant ministerial changes that are currently slowing down negotiations, we hope for a swift resolution to the crucial issues related to the organization of care and remuneration for our approximately 160 Quebec rheumatologists, as well as access to the technical platforms necessary for optimal practice. We are also advocating for the inclusion of an arbitration clause to regulate working conditions in the event of a dispute, thereby ensuring fair and transparent processes for our members in the future and avoiding a repeat of the current negotiation stalemate with the next administration.

In order to modernize our practice, this year we launched a strategic initiative to evaluate the integration of ultrasound into our clinical practice. This project aims to fully recognize its diagnostic and therapeutic value and to ensure fair and appropriate remuneration.

In addition, our pilot project with the *Institut de la pertinence des actes médicaux (IPAM)*, aimed at supporting medical practice in rheumatology, will continue its activities for the coming year pending renewal by the provincial government. Three sites are now fully operational, and we are confident that we will be able to continue rol-

ling out this innovative project, which provides Quebec patients with better access to care.

At our annual conference held in Quebec City from October 2nd to 4th, 2025, we were pleased to present the AMRQ Merit Award to Dr. Gaëlle Chédeville, a pediatric rheumatologist at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), in recognition of her outstanding commitment to the discipline. We also inaugurated a new award: the Rising Star Award in Rheumatology in Quebec, presented to Dr. Arielle Mendel, a young rheumatologist at the MUHC whose research career is taking off in remarkable fashion.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the past year has been rich in achievements, and that the coming year promises to be decisive for the improvement of our working conditions and the future of rheumatology in Quebec. The AMRQ will continue its efforts with determination, driven by the commitment of its members and the vision of its board of directors.

Together, we will continue to advance our specialty and provide quality care to patients in Quebec.

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