

## Update from the ORA

By Deborah Levy, MD, FRCPC

On behalf of the Ontario Rheumatology Association (ORA), please accept a warm greeting! The CRAJ is a great forum to share our successes with colleagues, and to reflect upon the achievements over the past year. I am fortunate to work with a committed executive, board and committee chairs and members, all of whom have fuelled the success of our initiatives and events. Together we are committed to improving rheumatology care across Ontario as well as nationally through our important partnerships.

### A few highlights:

The Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) with the theme of “Strength in Collaboration, Innovation in Practice” was held at the Kingbridge Centre this past May and was a great success, once again surpassing our prior attendance records. Our state-of-the-art meeting featured renowned Canadian and international speakers including Dr. Mandy Nikpour, Dr. Victoria Werth, Dr. Elizabeth Stringer, Dr. Maja Djikic, Dr. Tom Appleton, Dr. Mats Junek and Dr. Janet Pope, alongside several other highly respected “local” rheumatologists. Feedback and reviews from attendees including rheumatologists, allied health and industry partners were uniformly excellent. We are already looking forward to the 2026 ASM scheduled for May 22nd-24th at the same location. This meeting is open to rheumatologists across the country, so please mark your calendars. Details will be available in the new year.

The Informatics Committee, chaired by Dr. Tom Appleton, is set to release RheumViewPLUS™ this Fall. The new launch will include a powerful integrated AI Assistant known as ROXI (Rheumatology Optimized eXpert Intelligence). ROXI takes AI in the rheumatology practice to a new level. In addition to the capabilities of a regular AI Scribe and Note Generator, ROXI offers the never-before-seen capability of a Charting Agent that extracts key information from a transcript and immediately enters it as structured data in the chart. ROXI also offers an integrated AI-assisted Rheumatology Consultant that supports AI chat consultations. ROXI combines the power of AI, rheumatology expertise and RheumView™. We are excited to make this tool available to our members!

The Government Affairs Committee, chaired by Dr. Jane Purvis, continues to meet regularly with the Ministry to ensure that Ontario rheumatologists and their patients are well served by government programs. Goals



Dr. Dana Jerome was presented with the ORA Rheumatologist of the Year Award by Dr. Philip Baer.

include streamlining paperwork for prescribers and reducing wait times for patients needing medications. The committee is also active in advocating for a General Practitioner-focused practice designation in Primary Care Rheumatology. This has involved collaboration with the OMA Section of Rheumatology, allied health professionals and testimonials from patients.

The RheumOpportunities committee, chaired by Dr. Faiza Khokar, held its inaugural “Rheum to Discover” event on September 27th, 2025, hosted at McMaster University. This event welcomed 35 first- and second-year medical students from the seven Ontario medical schools to a day-long introduction to rheumatology event. It began with an inspirational talk by Dr. Simon Carette, and included hands-on workshops, interactive learning sessions, and Q&A panels with adult and pediatric rheuma-



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tologists representing the different career stages as well as work environments. Feedback has been enthusiastically positive, and we are looking forward to establishing this annual ORA event in our calendars. With this early introduction, we expect a strong future for the Ontario rheumatology workforce.

The Northern Ontario Committee, chaired by Dr. Kamran Shaikh, has been working hard in its goal to improve equitable access to rheumatological care in northern communities. A pilot project that began in 2022 in Thunder Bay demonstrated successful results, leading to its expansion across other hubs in northern Ontario. The committee also created a Clinical Pearls document around care provision for Indigenous populations. This resource was disseminated to the ORA membership and is also available on our website.

Dr. Jonathan Park and Dr. Jennifer Lee co-chair our Pediatric Committee. They have been working on a province-wide quality improvement initiative aimed at assessing and enhancing access to care for patients newly diagnosed with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) in Ontario. The four academic pediatric rheumatology centres (London, Hamilton, Toronto, and Ottawa) are evaluating current access-to-care metrics—specifically whether children diagnosed with JIA are assessed promptly by a pediatric rheumatologist, while identifying existing gaps in care. We look forward to seeing these results at the next CRA ASM.

At the ORA board, we thank Dr. Dana Cohen for her service in completing her term, and welcome Dr. Andrew Chow as a new board member. The Executive will continue its momentum without any changes until after the 2026 ASM, and I am looking forward to a membership engagement event in Ottawa in January 2026. Special thanks to Dr. Sahil Koppikar on completing his term as Chair of the Northern Ontario Committee, and for his innumerable hours dedicated to establishing government funding for the new Models of Care. A warm welcome to Dr. Gemma Cramarossa who has taken on co-chair responsibilities for the Early Rheumatologists of Ontario (ERO) committee.

Congratulations are also extended to our 2025 ORA Award Winners, given out at our ASM. Dr. Dana Jerome was awarded the ORA Rheumatologist of the Year, Dr. Catherine Ivory was given the Early Career Rheumatologist Award, and Dr. Michael Sugai and Dr. Lynn Hamilton received the Distinguished Members Award. Each award was well-deserved and deeply appreciated.

The ORA has multiple other exciting initiatives underway. All of these events and initiatives would not be possible without the countless volunteer hours of our dedicated leadership team and ORA members. We are also incredibly grateful for our fantastic Executive Director, Sandy Kennedy, for her dedication to ensuring our ongoing success.

All the best for the coming year.

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