

I consider this experience to have been a unique privilege! I would never have been given the same learning opportunity as part of a clerkship or residency. The teaching of medicine in today's environment is based on a system in which interns approach patients alone, do their best to collect as much information as possible about the patients' medical history and condition, and perform a physical examination to the best of their ability and their knowledge. Had I not had the opportunity to observe firsthand a rheumatologist in daily practice, I would never have understood the full human dimension of the work, the close therapeutic bond that exists between patient and rheumatologist, and the challenge of managing chronic conditions. This direct observation made me more aware of what the practice of rheumatology entails and the qualities that are needed in this specialty, the diagnostic and therapeutic challenges being faced, and especially the

outstanding group of patients that rheumatologists care for.

Since that summer, I have not experienced a single day of doubt or regret about my choice of career. I am in my last year of rheumatology training and will be leaving on a one-year fellowship to advance my clinical and scientific knowledge of scleroderma, mixed connective tissue diseases, and inflammatory myositis. I will also receive training in musculoskeletal ultrasound and capillaroscopy. Once I have finished, I will be returning to the environment where I have always felt at home, at my alma mater, the CHUL-CHUQ.

*Alexandra L. Albert, MD
Laval University,
Centre Hospitalier de l'Université Laval (CHUL)-CHUQ
Québec City, Québec*

Reflections: Dr. Derek Haaland.

Rheumatology. It is not a familiar word to a lot of the lay public, the way "Cardiology" or "Respirology" are. In 1999, when I started Medical School at Dalhousie University, it was not all that familiar to me either. I knew it had something to do with muscles, bones and joints; to be honest, at that time, the whole discipline sounded pretty dry. I had gained strong interest in the basic and academic aspects of internal medicine during my BSc and MSc training, and a particular interest in autoimmune disease, but had not given rheumatology any real consideration. I did not understand the word.

Rheumatology instantly entered the equation after attending an evening career talk during my pre-clerkship years given by Dr. John Hanly. It was during that talk, and speaking afterwards with Dr. Hanly, that I first truly began to understand the meaning of the word.

I had the excellent fortune to be awarded one of the then Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA)-



Merck Summer Studentships. This was in 2001, the inaugural year of the awards, and the summer before I began clerkship. Dr. Evelyn Sutton kindly supervised the Studentship, giving me the wonderful opportunity to work with and learn from her and her colleagues.

It was that summer that I really got to know Rheumatology: not the discipline—I am still working on that, and will never stop—but the essence. For me, 2001 was the Summer of Love—the summer I fell in love with Rheumatology. (Tear-jerking story, I know. Apologies to my wife).

As the days grew shorter, I knew the summer, and with it the Studentship, had to come to an end. But unlike many summer flings, my love for Rheumatology did not die with my return to school that fall (More apologies to my wife). I went on to complete my MD at Dalhousie, and then returned home to Ontario to complete post-graduate residency training in internal medicine, combined Fellowship training in Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology & Allergy, and a Geoff Carr Lupus Fellowship at McMaster.

I now live in Shanty Bay, Ontario with my beautiful wife and two sons. And Rheumatology. I have a private practice in Barrie, and also work at the Lupus Clinic at McMaster. I suspect I would have eventually met Rheumatology at some point on my travels, but thanks to a timely CRA-Merck Summer Studentship, she (as I write this, I am really hoping Rheumatology is, in fact, a woman) stole my heart before I had any chance to

even look at Cardiology, Respiriology or other such temptresses.

*Derek Haaland, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Assistant Clinical Professor, McMaster University
Divisions of Clinical Immunology & Allergy and
Rheumatology
Shanty Bay, Ontario*

Reflections: Dr. Steven Katz.

Every year or two, I am asked by the Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) to come forward and share my experiences from the CRA Summer Studentship Program. I am asked not as a rheumatologist or preceptor, but as a former CRA summer student myself.

The CRA Summer Studentship Program—offered now for more than a decade—allows countless first- and second-year medical students the opportunity to immerse themselves into our world and see (hopefully) how great rheumatology is. At its most successful—and as in my case—it



piques the trainee's interest to pursue a promising and fulfilling career as a rheumatologist. At worst, it provides one more physician the basic tools to know what a rheumatologist does and better assist their future patients with rheumatic disease.

The reason this program is so important for the rheumatology community is illustrated from my own experience. Rheumatology lacks exposure amongst medical students. Ultimately, this translates upwards to residents, physicians and the public. How many times are we asked exactly what we do as rheumatologists? How often do you hear: what is rheumatology? As a second-year medical student, I admit I was not much different. I had seen the advertising for the Studentship program and thought that since I may have been interested in geriatric medicine, a summer in rheumatology—arthritis affects old people of course!—would be a perfect fit. Of course, I was quickly shown the error of my ways. Despite my lack of understanding (or perhaps because of it!), the kind, fun, and fantastic rheumatology team in Winnipeg took me in that summer. I had my first

continuous clinical exposures, my longest outpatient experience until I reached my rheumatology residency, and my first crack at clinical research. Ultimately, I discovered an area of medicine that I had been searching for but did not know existed: featuring continuity of care, exciting therapeutics, clinical skills, variety of cases and diseases, and more and more. It was not "just arthritis".

The literature shows repeatedly that early rheumatology exposure is one of the greatest factors leading to trainee interest and, ultimately, the development of future rheumatologists. If it

had not been for the Summer Studentship program, I have no doubt I would have missed out on this career. I remember too many colleagues when I was a resident, and senior residents who rotate through rheumatology now, who regret not having that early exposure, as it may have influenced their career decisions.

I am proud to be a CRA Summer Studentship graduate and now, Summer Studentship Preceptor. I know personally how important this program is. It will help ensure the growth and prosperity of rheumatology in Canada for years to come.

*Steven J. Katz, MD, FRCPC
Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine,
Division of Rheumatology,
Associate Program Director,
Internal Medicine Residency Program,
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta*