

# Training the Rheumatologists of Tomorrow: One School's Story

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## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

As of 2013 there were 371 rheumatologists in Canada<sup>1</sup> to meet the needs of 35.2 million people.<sup>2</sup> Using an accepted benchmark of 1 specialist per 50, 000 people<sup>3</sup> Canada will need nearly twice the number currently registered.

Although the number of patients with rheumatological diseases in Ontario has increased over the last 15 years there has been no change in the number of rheumatologists (about 160)<sup>4</sup> or 0.75 rheumatologist per 50,000 people.<sup>5</sup>

This points to the need to increase the number of rheumatologists. In July 2012 the McMaster Rheumatology program conducted an internal review to help answer this question.

## OBJECTIVE

To identify ways to attract more learners.

## ATTRACTING LEARNERS TO RHEUMATOLOGY

### How to Increase Interest in the Field

Virtually all respondents noted that early exposure and lots of it are key to increasing the number of rheumatology trainees. For undergraduates this can be through activities offered in an MSK block as part of their medical education program plus in clinical or research electives during clerkship. For post-graduates programs should ensure that PGY-1s and -2s have access to the few places available for a rheumatology rotation. Regular special events are also important.

*"I had a rheumatology elective experience as a medical student so in the back of my mind I was always interested in rheumatology, even though I didn't decide on it as a career until later."* [TR-6]

Reasons for early exposure to rheumatology are to help learners better understand the field & to support those developing an interest in this subspecialty, particularly before residents select a subspecialty.

*"I think rheumatology is one of those things where you need to actually have an experience, do it, and [then you might] think, 'Oh, this is actually very interesting & not what I heard about it'."* [NF-4]

Mentors are crucial to promoting rheumatology, particularly those who readily share knowledge & inspire learners, include learners on research projects, and reveal the positive aspects of the lifestyle & workplace of rheumatologists.

*"I've gotten great mentorship over the years in rheumatology.... [I'm in this field] because of [that] & being exposed to the field early on."* [TR-19]

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Our findings echo those from recent studies in the UK, the US and Canada<sup>6-8</sup> that found early exposure to rheumatology in medical school or 1st year of post-graduate training were reasons that rheumatologists chose this subspecialty.

To further develop ways to increase the number of rheumatologists in Canada we have expanded this study to include training programs across the country supported by a CIORA grant.

We will next use data from this national study as the basis for a cross-national collaboration to develop methods & materials for use in rheumatology postgraduate programs.

## METHODS

### Data Types and Sources:

documents (2011-12 survey of Internal Medicine residents completing a rheumatology rotation), interviews with learners, faculty and administrators

### Data Analysis:

Thematic Framework Analysis (a systematic way to use deductive and inductive processes while transforming raw data into matrices displaying themes (topics), subthemes (specific issues & topics) & sources.

## RESULTS

### Sample:

We are highlighting the experiences & views of trainees (n = 4) & recent graduates (new faculty members; n = 5). **Trainees (Tr):** 50% are women; 50% PGY1, 50% PGY2; 75% undergraduate & residency training not at McMaster. **New Faculty (NF):** 60% are women; 60% graduated less than 1 year ago, 40% 3 years ago. None did undergraduate training at McMaster; 80% completed residency training & all did their rheumatology training at McMaster.

### Messages to Share with Learners

**What attracts people to the field (n = 50 comments):** Over half of the comments are about the quality of work life & the nature of rheumatological diseases. Other topics include the science behind rheumatology, patients (interactions with them and the ability to provide relief) & quality of personal life.

*"Most of the time I get to see patients who have fascinating diseases so I'm always learning."* [NF-15]

*"In the last couple of decades there has also been a lot of new treatments ... especially ... biologic medications so there's a lot of capacity to make a significant impact on their disease ... it's really rewarding that we can do a lot for the patients."* [TR-5]

*"I like my relationships with patients. Because we provide longitudinal care we see them frequently ... so you get to know them and develop relationships."* [NF-15]

*"[I like that you can] fashion your practice so you have time for family."* [NF-16]

**What you would tell undergraduates about the positives of being a rheumatologist (n = 25 comments):** Most comments are about work life, the science of rheumatology & ability to help patients. Other topics included the nature of rheumatological diseases & personal life.

*"The [great] opportunity for jobs in the future ..."* [FELLOW-8]

*"I think [I would tell them about] the collegiality & ... flexibility of doing a lot of different things that I like to do."* [NF-4]

*"There's a lot of research going on. It [rheumatology] is going to change a lot in the next few decades. It's kind of an exciting time to be in rheumatology."* [TR-6]

*"The patient satisfaction level is great."* [NF-4]

## REFERENCES

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