

## ACR in San Diego: Imprinting New Memories Over Old Ones

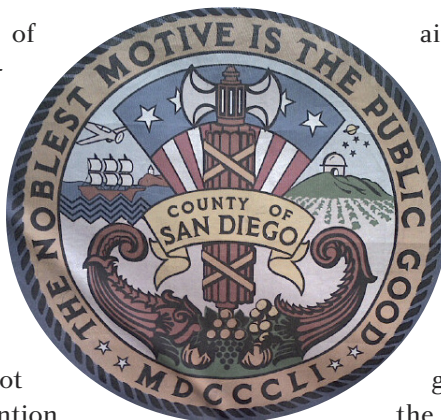
By Philip A. Baer, MDCM, FRCPC, FACR

**M**y first American College of Rheumatology (ACR) conference in San Diego was unforgettable. The year was 2005 and it was probably the last conference I attended without bringing my own laptop. Internet cafes were still in vogue in the exhibit area. I booked at the last minute and ended up at a cheap non-ACR hotel under renovation, which was serviceable; I did not spend much time there. The convention centre was a nice walk away through the Gaslamp Quarter. There were also enough ACR-sanctioned hotels around that I could catch the conference shuttle (impossible now without paying an added fee, but things were looser back then).

I attended a preconference Advisory Board from which I only recall one thing: Do not try to blank out an LCD projector by putting a piece of paper in front of the lens! Fortunately, the hosts put out the resulting fire at the “wisps of smoke” stage.

I had an evening flight booked home on the last day of the conference. I remember standing in bright sunshine outside the convention centre and finding a cab. By the time I arrived at the airport, thick fog had descended. My flight was repeatedly delayed and then cancelled as the plane never made it to San Diego. Not good when I had an office booked the next day and a continuing medical education (CME) presentation to deliver that evening. I called my wife with the bad news, and she contacted my secretary to deal with the patients.

Fortunately, I had company. I met up with Dr. Jan Schulz, a rheumatology colleague I knew from my training in Montreal. He was stranded too, and neither one of us had a hotel room. We joined forces and returned to my cheap hotel hoping for a room, as all the airport vicinity hotels were fully booked. It turned out they only had one room left, with a queen bed. We ended up spending the night sleeping fitfully in it, before returning to the



airport and testing our luck. I ended up on a flight to Houston and then Toronto. A taxi from the airport dropped me at my presentation venue, minutes before the talk was to start. My wife met me there with my laptop, much to the relief of the organizing representative. No one complained too much that I delivered my presentation wearing a neon-green T-shirt I had been given at one of the ACR exhibit booths: it was the only clean shirt I had left!

Fast forward to 2013. The CRA Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) in February meant I spent Valentine’s Day without my wife in Ottawa, and the ACR in October meant I was celebrating my birthday on Canada Night with many of my colleagues, but with my wife back home again. Fortunately, my son Jeffrey decided to take advantage of the hotel room I had already booked, and the need to use his vacation days before the end of the year, to join me in San Diego.

Consequently, I have much better memories this time. A nicer hotel, a spacious convention centre, a conference replete with cutting-edge basic and clinical science presentations and excellent reviews of rheumatology and non-rheumatology topics of interest to rheumatologists, Thieves Markets, workshops, and Meet-the-Professor sessions all helped. The latter two series had strong Canadian content, with featured speakers including Dr. Janet Pope, Dr. Robert Inman, Dr. Ed Keystone, Dr. Walter Maksymowych and Dr. Baer (not this Baer—I know I have nothing to teach other rheumatologists—that was Dr. Alan Baer, an American expert on Sjögren’s). Canadians were also well-represented as faculty at the numerous pre-meeting courses, including Dr. Vivian Bykerk, Dr. Hani El-Gabalawy, and Dr. Mary-Ann Fitzcharles. There really is something for everyone.

I presented two posters, featuring Canadian registry data, including one which was selected for a Guided Poster Tour. I had the run of the conference the rest of the

time, once all of our CRA and CRAJ meetings were completed. One particular highlight was the opening lecture presented by Dr. Craig Venter, the geneticist who won the race to sequence the human genome. He is a fascinating character, and I highly suggest reading his autobiography, *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life*. Another interesting session modelled on the CRA was The Great Debate: Biologics or Triple Therapy for the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis? with Dr. James O'Dell and Dr. Ron van Vollenhoven as combatants. I think I know whom Dr. Vandana Ahluwalia and Dr. Keystone, the Canadian co-authors of the RACAT study on this topic recently published in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*,<sup>1</sup> were cheering for.

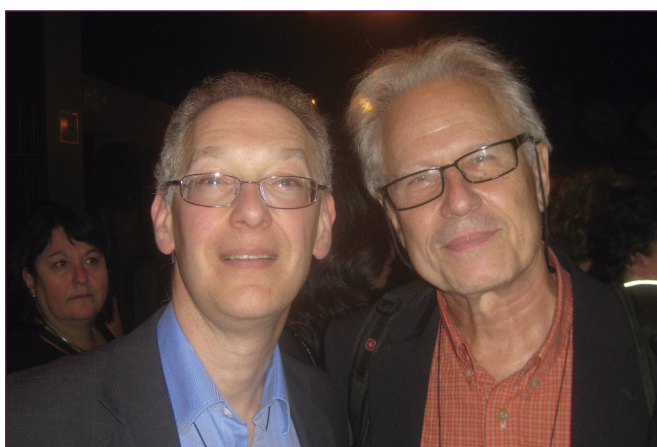
The host city provided great weather and many sites to see, including the famous San Diego Zoo, the USS Midway, Balboa Park, the Embarcadero, and a heritage Old Town district. Excellent food, from Mexican to BBQ and everything in between, was also readily accessible. No fog this time, though Air Canada advanced our return flight home by five hours, forcing me to miss the last morning of the meeting (I forgive them as they did upgrade me to business class three times in the last two months, twice gratis).

I look forward to seeing many of you at ACR 2014 in Boston.

#### Reference

1. O'Dell JR, Mikuls TR, Taylor TH, et al. Therapies for Active Rheumatoid Arthritis after Methotrexate Failure. *N Engl J Med* 2013; 369(4):307-18.

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Reunited in 2013: Dr. Baer and Dr. Schulz.

## Don't Go It Alone!

### Arthritis Cross-disciplinary Research Leads to Development of a Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program

Dr. Mary Bell, from Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, investigated the impact of a peer support program on people living with early inflammatory arthritis (EIA). Her unique research team included two patients, also known as "consumers": Dawn Richards, PhD, from

the Canadian Arthritis Network's Consumer Advisory Council, and Jennifer Boyle, PhD. The intervention model they developed resulted in improvements for mentees in overall impact of arthritis on life, coping efficacy, and social support.

A subsequent pilot randomized control trial (RCT), supported with a grant from the Canadian Initiative for Outcomes in Rheumatology Care (CIORA), showed that early peer support improved perceived social support but had little effect on other outcomes.

However, Dr. Bell and Dr. Jennifer Stinson at the Hospital for Sick Children have recently been awarded a Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) grant to develop an online version of peer-to-peer mentoring for adolescents and the research team is now seeking funding to do a larger RCT. Research thus far has been made possible in part through funding from the Canadian Arthritis Network (CAN) and the CIHR.

For more information about the research, contact Mary Bell at [mary.bell@sunnybrook.ca](mailto:mary.bell@sunnybrook.ca).

