



Northwest Territories

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This summer marks the 20th year I have been traveling to the Northwest Territories to do the rheumatology outreach clinic. Back in 1997, merely a week out of residency, I started what has turned out to be the most challenging and rewarding aspect of my practice. It continues to amaze me that with a population of less than 50,000 I manage to still see such fascinating pathology. I have continued to do a four-day clinic four times per year, sometimes accompanied by one of our rheumatology trainees from Edmonton.

Over time the waitlist for routine appointments has increased to unacceptable levels. I have had productive meetings with senior administration to look at solutions to bring down waiting times. I have drafted a referral guideline document that should help reduce unnecessary referrals and allow for early identification and treatment of inflammatory arthritis at the primary care level. We are examining expanding the role of physical therapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) as well as nurse practitioners who already play a large role in providing services in the NWT. The territory-wide electronic medical record (EMR) has been a great help in improving efficiency, both in triage and case management.

I was very pleased when one of our new rheumatology grads, Dr. Carrie Ye, expressed interest in doing a couple of clinics this year to help shorten the waitlist. She had enjoyed her time up in Yellowknife with me as a resident that she wanted more. Our waitlist for routine referrals went from 2.5 years at the beginning of 2017 to a manageable 3-6 months now.

Moving forward the challenge will be to continue to provide timely access not only to new referrals, but also adequate follow up and support for the primary care providers looking after our arthritis patients. Access to echocardiography locally is very limited. Pulmonary function testing and bone densitometry are not available in the territory and patients need to be referred out for these services.

—Dr. Dale Sholter



Stanton Medical Centre with the new hospital under construction in the background.



The mesmerizing Northern Highlights.

Photo credit: Carrie Ye