

A Time of Change

By Janet Yale, outgoing President and CEO of the Arthritis Society

In January, after more than seven years, I retired from my position as President and CEO of the Arthritis Society. Coming from the private sector, some thought it might be an odd fit. But the challenge of leading one of the country's best-known national health charities turned out to be the great thrill of my professional life.

We all know these are not easy times for health charities. Particularly when we're talking about a chronic disease such as arthritis. Volunteers and dollars are harder to come by. Programming is difficult to execute and outreach is challenged by changes in everything from technology to demography.

When I took on the job, we committed to a plan to modernize and move forward. Our goal was simple: To boost our reach, our relevance and our return. And that meant change – to our organization's structure, our approach and mission, our use of technology, our fundraising and culture.

Working together with partners like the Canadian Rheumatology Association, we embraced that change. We may not be all the way there just yet – my successor Trish Barbato has plenty of work ahead. But I believe we are on our way.

Many elements went into that progress, but I always felt that transformation of our service model was vital. In that respect, one particular example stands out.

In 2013, the pediatric rheumatology clinic at Saskatoon's Royal University Hospital was treating about 300 children annually. But the clinic was woefully under-resourced. Its leader, Dr. Alan Rosenberg, wanted just one nurse to help sustain the load. But the Saskatoon Health Authority simply didn't have the funds.



We stepped in and agreed to support a pilot project, hiring a terrific nurse to serve the needs of those 300 kids and to build the business case for the Health Authority. Her mission, which we financed and helped shape, was to show that these kids deserved that support and should receive it permanently.

It worked. By the pilot's conclusion, the Health Authority acknowledged her impact and hired the nurse full-time, as the clinic moved into the new Jimmy Pattison Children's Hospital in Saskatoon.

What I love about this story is that it tells you what the modern Arthritis Society can be. We played a surgical and specific role. It wasn't about writing a cheque and delivering the ser-

vice ourselves. That model is increasingly difficult to maintain. Instead, we used our dollars to address a clear systemic gap, to serve as a real voice for patients, and to leverage a lasting systemic improvement.

There are many other such examples, but the point is that today's Arthritis Society is a changed organization. It has a new model, a new approach and is achieving greater reach, relevance and results – on its own and with partners like the CRA. In the years ahead, I expect its success to grow even greater. And I feel so fortunate to have played a part in that process for these past seven years.

*Janet Yale
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Arthritis Society*