

# Rising Star: Dr. Alex Legge

When I first received the invitation to contribute to a “Rising Stars in Rheumatology” issue of *CRAJ*, I was initially very surprised and honoured to be thought of in this regard. However, as I sat down to put pen to paper, I quickly became horrified at the prospect of writing an article about myself and my accomplishments. I plan to discuss this further with my therapist.

This exercise has proven to be a wonderful opportunity for reflection on my long journey to becoming a rheumatologist and all of the people without whom my success would not have been possible. If I am to be considered a rising star, it is only because they have allowed me to shine.

I have always been proud of my humble beginnings, growing up in a small town in rural Nova Scotia. Most of the credit for my early academic success belongs to my parents for their unwavering love and support throughout all of my endeavours. It is a blessing that my father was able to see me graduate from Dalhousie University’s medical school at the top of my class, shortly before his untimely passing. My mother continues to be my #1 fan and she is ecstatic that, after many years of training, I finally have a “real job”.

My mother was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) when I was a teenager. Therefore, I entered medical school with the uncommon knowledge that rheumatology was, in fact, a real medical subspecialty, and not just a made-up word. This led me to pursue a first-year elective in rheumatology with a preceptor named Dr. Trudy Taylor. I could not have asked for a better role model to introduce me to the specialty — I wanted to be just like Dr. Taylor. Many years later, nothing has changed!

During medical school, I developed an interest in clinical research and, as I was preparing to start my residency training in Halifax, I was introduced to a potential research supervisor named Dr. John Hanly. Nearly ten years later, I continue to benefit from his mentorship. He has provided me with countless research opportunities, including supervising my Master’s thesis in Community Health & Epidemiology, for which I was awarded the Governor General’s Medal in the Natural Sciences & Engineering by our institution. It is a tremendous honour and privilege that he has entrusted me to lead the Dalhousie Lupus Clinic and oversee the Dalhousie Lupus Clinic Registry following his retirement from clinical practice last year. Luckily for me, he remains responsive to emails and available for Zoom calls even in his retirement.



I have been fortunate to continue to collect wonderful mentors throughout my training. During my rheumatology residency in Halifax, Dr. Volodko Bakowsky supervised my longitudinal clinic, and this is where I really discovered my passion for mysterious clinical cases.

Last but not least, I am so glad that I finally parted ways with the East Coast, if only for one year, to complete a research fellowship in Vancouver with Dr. Diane Lacaille, who has taught me so much.

Transitioning to practice is a challenge, and I tend to focus on all of my shortcomings. Writing this article has given me a chance to reflect on the successes of my first year in clinical practice. Highlights include establishing an Arthritis Research Canada centre in Halifax, becoming a full member of the Systemic Lupus International Collaborating Clinics (SLICC), and traveling to South Korea to speak at the 2023 International Congress on SLE. With the help of some amazing research coordinators, our research program continues to thrive, with ongoing projects in neuropsychiatric lupus and investigating the impact of frailty on people living with rheumatic diseases.

I remain indebted to the individuals mentioned above for their ongoing support of my career, and I would be remiss if I did not mention my wonderfully supportive husband Davor and our Bernese Mountain Dog “Poppy”, who fill my time away from work with so much joy.

It turns out that writing about myself was not as painful as I thought it would be. I wonder what my therapist will say about that.

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