

The CRA's 2023 Emerging Teacher-Educator: Dr. Steven Thomson

Can you recall a teacher in your own past who inspired your direction into education?

I can think of two teachers. The first was my eighth-grade teacher, Mr. Ron Bloxam. He never accepted anything less than my best. He always wanted more but was very encouraging. He knew I wanted to go into medicine, and so referred to me back then as "the good doctor." The second was my grade 13 biology teacher, Mrs. Jeanette Denes. As part of a peer teaching experience, she allowed me to teach a grade 9 science class an entire unit with content I created, while I helped her teach the remainder of the semester. It was an incredible experience.

As a member of the University of Calgary faculty, you led the local implementation of Competency by Design for rheumatology. Most recently, you have taken on the role of Rheumatology Residency Program Director. Your teaching duties include weekly musculoskeletal (MSK) teaching sessions, multiple academic half days for different groups, as well as lectures for the medical school and directing the continuing medical education (CME) activities for the Division of Rheumatology in Calgary.

a) Can you tell us more about these projects and any others that are underway?

Way back, pre-pandemic, we were working on a plan to better teach rheumatologic emergencies. Those rare things that we don't often see but need to recognize right away. We had a three-part plan and content developed. It got sidelined by work from home and no in-person gatherings. I am hopeful we can resurrect that.

b) Nationally, you have joined the CRA education committee where you serve on the Continuing Professional Development sub-committee. You also recently started your own training in MSK ultrasound. Where do you see the future of medical education moving?

I think like most of the world, rheumatology education and medical education in general are going to move towards an on-demand approach. I foresee websites like Up-to-Date and other resources having a lot more video content. You will be



able to log on and select a topic and see a lecture from one of the world's experts, or at least someone who is an excellent teacher in that field.

I hope that we see a rise in giving our students skills in effectively using learning resources, and how to manage their time to allow them to stay up to date on the medical information landscape that is growing at an exponential rate. The ability to learn, unlearn and relearn things will be increasingly important for new generations of physicians.

What was your first thought when you learned that you would receive this award?

Given it is 2023, the first thing I did was check to make sure it wasn't spam . . . I was not expecting an award and everyone knows the pitfalls of phishing. Having done that,

I thought how wonderful it was that someone thought I was contributing in a positive way. I began to wonder who would have nominated me. Then I thought about all the other excellent educators we have in this field and made sure that I'm making a list and checking it twice so that I can pay it forward in future years, so emerging educators beware!

As a respected teacher-educator, what would your advice be to a prospective rheumatologist?

I would say to be systematic. Be structured in your patient care, be structured in your learning. Set guidelines and fail-safes for yourself. I'm not always at my best but, hopefully, I have enough structures in place that I can do a good job even on a substandard day.

As for teaching, just keep doing it. After my undergraduate time, I actually applied to teacher's college, and they turned me down. Then I tried applying for graduate school and they accepted me, which was particularly ironic since they then paid me to teach undergraduate classes. Be open to feedback and always try to improve.

If you weren't pursuing your interest in medical education as a career, what would you be doing?

I always wanted to be a Myth Buster. Those of a certain vintage will remember a show that ran on the Discovery Channel in the early 2000s. The idea of spending my days drea-



Dr. Steven Thomson receiving his award from CRA President Dr. Nigil Haroon at the CRA Annual Scientific Meeting in Quebec City, which took place in February 2023.

ming up ideas, building them, testing them, and then often blowing them up sounds absolutely fabulous.

If you had an extra hour in the day, how would you spend it?
I think at this time, I would probably spend it learning/reading in the woods or walking in the woods. I enjoy the peace

and find it restorative to be outside. Balance is good, but there is so much to do and learn.

You are marooned on a desert island. What book would you like to have on hand with you?

The biggest volume of encyclopedias you can find. I can read and learn, use them for insulation on cold nights, start fires, and maybe ultimately make a paper boat (a la Myth Busters) to get off the island after reading the section on boat building.

What is your dream vacation destination?

I would like to see Italy. Perhaps one year in the future when the European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR) meeting is there, I'll get to go.

How many cups of coffee does it take to make a productive day?

I can honestly say, I have never had a cup of coffee in my life. Love the smell, but tastes burnt to me.

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