

The CRA's 2025 Emerging Investigator: Dr. May Choi

You are a rheumatologist and clinician-scientist at the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary. Your research focuses on biomarker discovery and validation for the prediction of clinical outcomes in autoimmune rheumatic diseases and the prevention of autoimmune disease development and disease-related complications. You lead an immunology research laboratory (Artificial Intelligence and Autoimmune Diagnostics or AI.Dx) and biobank for local, national, and international collaborators.



a) Can you tell us more about your research and its implications?

I believe this is a truly exciting time to be in the field of rheumatology. There is still a great deal to uncover about these diseases and there are many opportunities to enhance patient care. Through my research, I hope to contribute to earlier and more accurate diagnosis, ultimately improving outcomes for patients. I'm also particularly interested in exploring strategies to prevent the onset of autoimmune diseases, which involves identifying markers that can help pinpoint individuals at higher risk.

b) Can you describe some of the most significant findings in this research area?

A recent advancement in the field is the incorporation of artificial intelligence, which I believe will become increasingly central to biomarker analysis and to advancing rheumatology as a whole.

You have been funded by several career development grants including the Lupus Foundation of America's Gary S. Gilkeson Career Development Award and the Arthritis Society's Stars Career Development Award. You have also received a Canadian Institutes of Health Research project grant and a Canadian Foundation of Innovation (CFI) John R. Evans Leaders Award in your first and second year on faculty, respectively.

In total, you have been nominated PI or co-investigator on 31 peer-reviewed grants totaling more than \$12.9

million. To date, you have published 87 peer-reviewed articles and four book chapters with an h-index of 23 and 1,640 citations. You have supervised and mentored 22 trainees at all stages of career development. Your most recent awards include the prestigious Lupus Foundation of America's 2023 Mary Betty Stevens Young Investigator Prize, Calgary Avenue Magazine's 2023 Top 40 Under 40, and the Association of Medical Laboratory Immunologists 2023 Future Leader and 2023 Young Investigator Award.

What is the professional accomplishment of which you are proudest to date?

Building my research team and my students' accomplishments.

What are some of the highlights and challenges you have experienced thus far in your career? How have you overcome these challenges?

Highlights: Being able to work with my team, collaborators, advocacy organizations, and my mentors. Challenges: Work-life balance. Still working on it.

For those wanting to pursue rheumatology and a career in research, what advice would you give them? Have you had key mentors who supported your career path? If yes, what were the key learnings you gained from them? How do you ensure "hitting the ground running" when you transition from training to being an independent investigator?

I've been fortunate to have had exceptional mentors throughout my career, including Drs. Marvin Fritzler, Ann Clarke, and Karen Costenbader. Their support and insight have been invaluable, shaping my research trajectory. One piece of advice I would offer is to stay open to further training and actively seek opportunities to expand your expertise and perspective. Embrace collaboration and never forget to express gratitude to those who have supported you along the way. I'm especially thankful to my institution for enabling me to pursue additional training in Boston and complete a degree in epidemiology—both of which have greatly strengthened my skills as a researcher.



Dr. May Choi receiving her award from CRA President Dr. Trudy Taylor at the CRA Annual Scientific Meeting in Calgary, which took place in February 2025.

If you weren't pursuing research as a career, what would you be doing?

I'd be in a band.

If you had an extra hour in the day, how would you spend it?

Learning how to cook.

What is your favourite food or cuisine?

My mom's cooking hands down.

What is your dream vacation destination?

Anywhere where I can sleep in.

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

At least two. One, if it's a Vietnamese coffee.

May Y. Choi, MD, MPH, FRCPC

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