

DOCTORS OF BC

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Section of Rheumatology

BC Society of Rheumatologists

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The BC Society of Rheumatologists (BCSR), in collaboration with the UBC Faculty of Medicine - Division of Rheumatology, announced results of a two-part study of rheumatology care in the province in November 2014.

### **Rheumatologist Demographics**

Studies have previously shown that there is a shortage of rheumatologists in B.C. In 2013/14, the BCSR worked to update its physician demographic information. These findings were published in the Canadian Rheumatology Association Journal in 2014. As of August 2013, there were 41 full-time equivalent rheumatologists practicing in BC. These 41 practitioners represented an increase of nine rheumatologists from 2010; these new positions were predominantly in centers with a population < 300,000 patients which was encouraging.

Compared to data from the Canadian 2013 National Physicians survey, rheumatologists in BC have been practicing for a significantly longer period of time, with over 60% having been licensed for over 20 years compared to the national average of 49%. Of working rheumatologists, 21% plan on retiring in the next five years and over 48% plan on retiring within the next 10 years.

### **Wait Times for Consults**

The research team also conducted a population-based study of the time from consultation request by a family practitioner to booking of the visit with a rheumatologist in British Columbia (using fictitious referrals). The study focused on two types of rheumatology patients: those with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and osteoarthritis (OA). The majority (93%) of B.C. rheumatologists booked an RA patient for consultation within 90 days of the request, which is within the guidelines set by the Canadian Rheumatology

Association. The wait time for OA patients was significantly longer, meaning that B.C. rheumatologists prioritize early RA patients over OA cases. The average wait time for OA patients is about 200 days, with some areas experiencing waits of up to 500 days.

### **Communities of Need**

This research has helped clearly identify the most under-served communities in the province.

Surrey: Surrey has a population of close to 500,000; however, according to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of B.C., at the time of publication, there were no actively practicing Royal College-certified rheumatologists in the city. The need for rheumatologists will only escalate with Surrey's rapidly expanding population and economic growth.

Prince George: Despite being a medical training facility for UBC, there are no active RCPSC rheumatologists in Prince George. The city also serves as a referral area for a large catchment of the north, making Prince George and the surrounding area highly under-served.

Kelowna: Kelowna also serves as a referral centre for a large region and is currently under-served. Wait times to see a rheumatologist are among the highest in B.C. Increasingly patients are travelling to the Lower Mainland for rheumatologic services. This data will help serve for future recruitment and retention planning.

The major meeting of the BCSR will occur in conjunction with the BC Rheumatology Invitational Education Series (BRIESE) to take place on September 25, 2015 in Vancouver.

Jason Kur, MD

President