



IN THE LOOP



Keeping OBRI patients informed

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The Ontario Best Practices Research Initiative was developed to improve the treatment and outcomes of Ontarians living with Rheumatoid Arthritis through the cooperative efforts of patients, researchers, rheumatologists and allied health care professionals.

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The information contained in this newsletter is not medical advice. The Ontario Best Practices Research Initiative offers evidence-based information and support to help you better understand your Rheumatoid Arthritis. Always seek the expert advice of your rheumatologist or other health care professional before making changes or additions to your treatment plan.



MESSAGE FROM THE OBRI

Thank you for participating in the Ontario Best Practices Research Initiative (OBRI)! Your involvement helps us monitor the long-term safety and efficacy of medical treatments for Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and Psoriatic Arthritis (PsA) to improve arthritis care and management for patients in Ontario.

2023 was a busy and successful year. Our cohort now includes more than 4,000 patients and 91 rheumatologists from across Ontario. We presented research and generated insights at international and national scientific meetings. On September 15, 2023, we hosted an in-person OBRI Conference for all rheumatologists, researchers, industry partners, and patients. The highlight of the day for many was the presentation by a patient, Donna, who described her RA journey. We also hosted the first PsA investigator meeting and had an initial look at the data collected over the past year.

The valuable information collected from our rheumatologists and patients resulted in 4 publications from the research projects described below.

- 1) We pooled our data with Rhumadata, a Quebec RA registry, to look at the discontinuation rates of Tofacitinib (Xeljanz) and TNF inhibitors.
- 2) We looked at the factors behind the discrepancy between physician and patient global assessment of disease.
- 3) We questioned if cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors are associated with the retention of biologic disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (bDMARDs) or targeted-synthetic DMARDs in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.
- 4) We looked at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients with RA. These findings are presented in the Research Update on page 2.

Wishing everyone all the best in the year ahead.

OBRI Investigator Profile: Dr. Arthur Lau



Dr. Arthur Lau completed his medical studies, including training in internal medicine and rheumatology, at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, concurrently earning both an MD and a MSc. in Health Research Methodology. He is an Assistant Professor, Division of Rheumatology, McMaster University. His clinical and research interests focus on the screening and treatment of osteoporosis, metabolic bone disease in patients with chronic kidney disease, and the treatment of inflammatory arthritis.

Dr. Lau is an OBRI investigator for both the Rheumatoid Arthritis and Psoriatic Arthritis research initiatives, and sits on the OBRI Clinical Advisory Committee. Over the past several years, Dr. Lau has mentored students interested in doing research using the OBRI data, including Dr. Matthew Wong-Pack, whose research is highlighted in this newsletter.

RESEARCH UPDATE

The OBRI is a clinical registry focused on improving quality of care and health outcomes for patients living with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in Ontario. In 2023, the OBRI had 9 abstracts accepted for presentation at national and international meetings and had 4 articles published. For more information about our research, please visit our website: www.obri.ca. Below is a summary of one of our 2023 publications.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients with rheumatoid arthritis: data from the Ontario Best Practices Research Initiative (OBRI)

The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for everyone. Dr. Matthew Wong-Pack and other OBRI researchers looked at the possible impact of COVID-19 on patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), using the information collected by OBRI.

March 15, 2020 marked the start of pandemic closures in Ontario. To look at the possible impact of COVID-19 on RA patients, 2 periods were defined: a pre-COVID-19 phase (the 12 months before 15 March 2020) and a COVID-19 phase (the 12 months after 15 March 2020). 1508 OBRI patients were included in the study. These patients had at least one interview or visit to a physician during both study periods.

Results: The number of in-person visits decreased during the pandemic. The disease activity both before and during the pandemic remained low. Scores for mental, social and physical health were either stable or improved. The use of biologics stayed stable throughout the pandemic. The use of DMARDs decreased and the use of Janus kinase inhibitors (e.g., Xeljanz, Rinvoq, Olumiant) increased.

Conclusion: The disease activity and patient-reported outcomes of the OBRI patients in this study remained stable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reference: Matthew Wong-Pack, Elliot Hepworth, Mohammad Movahedi, Bindee Kuriya, Janet Pope, Edward Keystone, Carter Thorne, Vandana Ahluwalia, Angela Cesta, Carol Mously, Claire Bombardier, Arthur Lau, Sibel Zehra Aydin, Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients with rheumatoid arthritis: data from the Ontario Best Practices Research Initiative (OBRI), *Rheumatology Advances in Practice*, Volume 7, Issue 2, 2023, rkad042, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rap/rkad042>

PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS REGISTRY

The OBRI Psoriatic Arthritis Registry, under the leadership of Dr. Sibel Aydin, has enrolled 88 patients so far. The study will look at the characteristics of Psoriatic Arthritis, patient-reported outcomes, work productivity, and response to treatment.

Originally based in Ontario, the registry expanded to British Columbia and Alberta, with the aim of comparing therapy choices and access between the provinces, and to advocate for better care and equity nationally. To reflect this change, the PsA registry was renamed the **Observational and Best Practices Research Initiative (OBRI-PsA)**.

Welcome to our newest OBRI-RA investigators

Dr. Kangping Cui (Bracebridge)
 Dr. Arpita Gantayet (Brampton)
 Dr. Melissa Holdren (Newmarket)
 Dr. Sonja Gill (Oakville)
 Dr. Hart Goldhar (Toronto)
 Dr. Imtiaz Khan (Mississauga)
 Dr. Stephanie Tom (Mississauga)
 Dr. Joanna Ueng (Mississauga)

OBRI PROJECTS FOR 2024

Biosimilar Survey

On December 20, 2022, the Ontario government announced a policy to increase the use of biosimilars in Ontario. The government believes this move will save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year and allow them to fund new drug therapies.

In 2023, the OBRI started a project to better understand patient perspectives and experiences of the Ontario Government's biosimilar initiative. OBRI patients were surveyed immediately following the announcement and were surveyed again in January 2024, one year following the implementation of this initiative. Results to be shared in future.

If you have questions about biosimilars, please speak with your rheumatologist or visit the Ontario Rheumatology Association website [2022-ORA-Position-Statement-Biosimilar-Switching.pdf](https://www.ontariorheum.ca/2022-ORA-Position-Statement-Biosimilar-Switching.pdf) (ontariorheum.ca).

ICES Linkages (formerly the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences).

ICES is a not-for-profit organization, funded by the Ontario government and holds publicly funded administrative health services records for the Ontario population, such as hospitalizations, emergency room visits, etc. OBRI is excited to link our clinical data with the ICES databases for the following projects.

a) COVID-19 in RA: ICES data has been linked to the OBRI data to investigate the prevalence and predictors of COVID-19 infection, severe infection requiring hospitalization, intensive care unit admission, intubation, and mortality. The findings from this study will help identify high-risk RA patients and guide treatment decisions.

b) Health Care Cost and Clinical Burden of Herpes Zoster Infections among Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis: The OBRI has linked its data to ICES administrative databases to create a unique cohort that will enable us to look at the impact of clinical data on health care costs related to Herpes Zoster infections.

The OBRI linked data allows for comparison between RA patients and the general population. The results will provide decision makers, payers, clinicians, and patients data on the rate and costs of herpes zoster for RA patients and the clinical burden associated with herpes zoster infections.

OBRI Patient Advisory Committee (PAC)

The OBRI PAC is a volunteer-led committee comprised of patient representatives. Its role is to represent and communicate patient perspectives to OBRI staff, investigators and stakeholders; and motivate and engage patients through education, knowledge transfer, and ongoing communication.

This year, PAC member Jennifer Boyle, together with the OBRI data analysis team, submitted an abstract which will be presented at the 2024 Canadian Rheumatology Association's Annual Scientific Meeting in Winnipeg, AB (Feb. 28 to March 2, 2024). The abstract has also been submitted to EULAR 2024, the annual European Congress of Rheumatology.

RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS:

Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance
www.arthritispatient.ca

Joint Health
www.jointhealth.org

Rheuminfo
www.rheuminfo.com

Arthritis Society of Canada
www.arthritis.ca

Canadian Spondylitis Association
www.spondylitis.ca

Arthritis Research Canada
www.arthritisresearch.ca

RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

Ontario Caregiver Association
<https://ontariocaregiver.ca>

CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVE

A Sign of Kindness

For a month in 2022, a billboard somewhere in Toronto read:

Do as many nice things for people every day without expecting anything in return. Grover

“Grover” is an eighty-seven year-old Torontonian named Doug Bower. On a whim, Grover booked the month-long billboard space for \$4,000.00. Within a day of telling his wife of his outlandish act, friends and family had paid for the sign. Even news outlets like CP24 and CBC took note of the sign. Bower’s simple message is, “Keep inspiring people about the good they can do and continue to spread the word.”

When I read this story in the Fall 2023 CAA Magazine (“Sending a Sign,” p. 55) I could not help but think that this notion captures the every-day mantra of caregivers. We do necessary things, but more often than not, they are nice things, and we expect nothing in return. My care-partner struggles getting out of the small boat in which we like to go fishing. I learned a necessary, but nice, thing from my daughter who instructed me to stand on the dock, take my care-partner’s hands in both my hands, and help her step out of the boat on to the dock. As others on their docks watched our little “dance” I could not help but think and hope that others were inspired to do good and kind things in their lives and relationships.

Our care-giving actions not only help our care-partners, but send a message and a “sign of kindness” to the world. I encourage us all as caregivers to check out [The Undercover Kindness Project](#).

By David Barker, OBRI Patient Advisory Committee Member



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***Have questions? Want to provide feedback?
Don't hesitate to contact us!***