



# IMPACT IN MOTION

YOUR LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Fall/Winter 2020

BREAKTHROUGHS AND BREAKING NEWS

## COVID-19 Update

### What your leadership means in a global pandemic

**Where We Are Today:** Strengthened by your ongoing leadership, we'll stop at nothing, even in a global health crisis, to come closer to living in a world where people are free from the devastating effects of arthritis.

**Our Response:** Your support has allowed us to join the battle against COVID-19. You may have heard about some early research studies testing whether chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine – drugs commonly used by people with rheumatoid arthritis and lupus – are effective at treating COVID-19.

**The Question:** In the urgent race to learn more about COVID-19, we're excited to launch a crucial research initiative to answer the pressing question: **How does COVID-19 impact people with arthritis who have immune systems that leave them vulnerable to infections?**

**The Research:** Dr. Paul Fortin and a team of top researchers from across the country are preparing to study 3,000 people with rheumatoid arthritis and lupus over the next two years to determine if those who are currently taking chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine to treat their arthritis symptoms are affected differently by the novel coronavirus compared to those not taking the drugs.

**Celebrate Arthritis Awareness Month with us this September**



Join our movement to help people say "Arthritis won't stop me."

**The Bonus:** Your gifts will keep giving! This research will also help researchers uncover more clues about arthritis, understanding the immune system, why our bodies attack themselves, and how they react to external threats like viruses in the ways they do.

**We're here with you – at the forefront of relevant information and cutting-edge research amidst this health crisis. With your incredible support, innovative progress can emerge in such a difficult time. Thank you!**

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## RESEARCHER PROFILE

# Exclusive: Q & A with Dr. Paul Fortin

## A landmark study is finding answers for Canadians living with arthritis

### **Dr. Fortin, why is it so important, during this pandemic, to study people who have arthritis?**

People with arthritis have immune systems that leave them more vulnerable to infections. Right now, they're living with a lot of fear and uncertainty about how COVID-19 will affect them. We can't really rely on the studies being done in the general population because those people have healthier immune systems. We urgently need to learn more about how a new virus like COVID-19 affects people with arthritis differently, so we can offer them hope during this difficult time.

### **We've heard a lot about the drug hydroxychloroquine. How is it used to treat some types of arthritis?**

Hydroxychloroquine is used to treat active lupus and rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and it's a key drug for keeping the disease in long-term remission. In Canada, we've already been studying people with RA and lupus who are taking hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine.

That triggered an idea. The same reason hydroxychloroquine works for autoimmune disease could help prevent a COVID-19 infection – or could worsen it. We need to know.

### **How did the Arthritis Society support the launch of such a large-scale study?**

Because of funding from Arthritis Society donors and other organizations, we already had a robust research infrastructure in place. Within a matter of days, we were able to access more than 2,000 lupus patients and nearly 1,000 people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) who were already involved in pre-existing studies and had blood samples from before COVID-19.

Without this infrastructure made possible by the Arthritis Society and other partners, we wouldn't be able to do this study at all. Instead, my team [co-principal investigators Drs. Eric Boilard and Deborah DaCosta, and patient delegate Marie-Claude Beaulieu] were able to hit the ground running, shaving weeks and even months off vital research time.



### **Why is it vital to have access to blood samples from before the pandemic?**

We're so grateful to be in a position where we have these blood samples from lupus and RA patients taken before January 2020, for a number of reasons. One is that they provide us with a solid baseline to see how those infected with COVID-19 are impacted while taking hydroxychloroquine.

But it also means we can continue to follow these 3,000 patients into 2021 and 2022 to see if they contracted the virus and if so, what was their immune response. As well, we'll be looking at the psychological impact of living through a pandemic with a compromised immune system.

### **How are other groups and researchers benefiting from this study?**

The Arthritis Society's leadership, in getting this study off the ground so quickly, has inspired researchers from across the country. It's very encouraging to see how our study is sparking innovative collaborations and is being leveraged by other researchers to apply for funding to perform additional immunology studies on arthritis and lupus patients. We're creating a library – with our databank and biological samples – that others will be able to access for their own research. Because of these collaborations, the impact donors can have will go far beyond a single study.

## STORIES OF INSPIRATION

# You've helped a dedicated caregiver get the care she deserves



**Marilyn Walsh graduated from nursing school with big dreams of pursuing her passion for helping others. But like so many Canadians, her plans were derailed by the devastating effects of arthritis.**

At just 22, Marilyn began enduring back pain and stiffness so severe that simple daily tasks were almost unbearable, leaving her unable to work or even socialize with friends. Batteries of tests came up with no answers. Pain and swelling spread throughout her whole body.

Finally, after 12 years of living with the pain and mystery of her condition, Marilyn received a correct diagnosis: **ankylosing spondylitis (AS)**, an aggressive form of inflammatory arthritis that primarily targets the spine.

While much of the damage done to her body over those years is irreversible, learning that she had AS was a relief. Finally, after years of pain and suffering, a proper diagnosis and treatment plan would improve Marilyn's quality of life.

She could once again fuel her passion for helping others. Now in her 50s, Marilyn is an active volunteer in her beloved medical field, and even sits on the board of the Canadian Spondylitis Association (CSA). She represents, supports and educates people living with AS.

She's also very active with the Arthritis Society, and was an avid participant in the Walk for Arthritis. "Arthritis won't stop me from living life!" says Marilyn.

Thanks to the advances in AS treatment, today Marilyn is strong enough to carry out her most important role yet: being the sole caregiver for her elderly parents. The right diagnosis changed her life.

**"Now that my condition is stable, I strive to give back to my community and enjoy time with friends. Most importantly, I support my elderly parents who were there to support me during some very trying years. I am very grateful to have the ability to do these things at this point in my life."**

**– Marilyn Walsh**

# Your gifts at work across Canada



## Finding clues in vitamin D among First Nations

First Nations people have higher than average rates of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), but it's not clear why. You're helping University of Manitoba researcher Dr. Vidyanand Anaparti start to unlock this mystery. He found higher vitamin D levels among First Nations people as they started to show symptoms of RA.

## Getting a better look at knee injuries

Tearing the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in the knee is a common sports injury that increases the risk of an athlete developing osteoarthritis (OA). Thanks to you, Dr. Steven Boyd and his team at the University of Calgary are using advanced medical imaging to see – in more detail than ever before – the earliest changes to the knee joint after an ACL injury.



## Bringing attention to mental health

Up to half of those living with lupus also deal with depression or anxiety that often goes undiagnosed. Now, your donations mean University Health Network's Dr. Zahi Touma can provide screening tools to healthcare providers, to help ensure patients get the timely psychiatric care and support they need.

## SPEAKING OUT FOR CHANGE

### No more waiting in pain

**The Problem:** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, joint replacement surgery wait times in Canada weren't reaching the medically recommended guideline of six months.

Too many Canadians are living with unnecessary pain and restricted mobility for too long.

**The Goal:** Providing better access to joint replacement surgeries and keeping people healthy where they live, work and play should be a priority for all governments.

**Your Impact:** Your support gives the Arthritis Society resources to advocate to the provincial and federal governments to prioritize joint replacement surgeries now. Governments need to address the backlog and long wait times for Canadians who simply want to move well again. You're making a difference for Canadians waiting for life-changing surgery.

## You inspire solutions

Provinces like Alberta and British Columbia have announced investments to prioritize wait times and catch up on the current backlog due to COVID-19. We're also putting together a pan-Canada working group to develop actionable recommendations to reduce wait times.

## What can I do?

During Arthritis Awareness Month, take action by sending a letter to your provincial and federal elected representatives at [arthritis.ca/takeaction](https://arthritis.ca/takeaction).

## By the Numbers

- Arthritis is the leading cause of **99% of knee replacement** surgeries and **80% of hip replacements**
- In 2019, **30% of patients** requiring joint replacement did not have their procedure done during the recommended wait time
- There is a large variation in wait times across Canada and, despite doing more surgeries, many provinces have seen increases in wait times since 2017
- In Canada, about **59,000** hip replacements and more than **70,000** knee replacements were performed in 2017-2018, a 17% increase over the last 5 years.



# Mental wellness in times of stress

*Many people find that as their arthritis pain increases, so does stress, anxiety and depression. And right now, it's safe to say we're all feeling more stressed than usual. How are you and your loved ones coping?*

There's no single "right way" to fight stress, but ignoring its effects can lead to other mental health issues.

Here are some suggestions adapted from the Canadian Mental Health Association. See which ones work best for you.

Some tips for handling stress while living with arthritis:

- **Identify the problem:** what are the underlying causes making you feel stressed?
- **Talk about your problem:** try opening up with family or friends if you're feeling overwhelmed and see if you can prioritize what's most important.
- **Learn helpful strategies:** thinking about what could go wrong can make a situation seem more difficult than it really is. Focusing on the positive, such as what you're able to control, can make it easier to address.
- **Start on the inside:** meditation, yoga, prayer or mindfulness can help clear your mind and see problems from a different point of view. The more you practice, the easier it will be to use these techniques when stressful situations arise.

- **Get active:** if you're able, take a short walk around the block. Even gentle stretching in place can alleviate stress.
- **Do something you enjoy:** schedule some time each day for at least one activity that makes you feel good – watch a movie, listen to music, do a crossword puzzle or call a friend. Your favourite activities are even more important when you're not feeling great.

## *Did you know?*

Depression and anxiety are more common in people living with arthritis than in the general population.

*If you are concerned about your mental health, speak to your doctor or contact your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. For further information, visit the Arthritis Society's resources on mental health at [www.arthritis.ca/mentalhealth](http://www.arthritis.ca/mentalhealth).*

TOOLS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

# Don't miss out!

As a member of the Arthritis Society community, you have free monthly access to the latest arthritis information, self-management tips, inspirational stories and more!

Sign up to receive the *flourish* e-newsletter and get health and wellness advice delivered right to your inbox. Don't miss a single article!



[Subscribe today at arthritis.ca/newsletter](https://www.arthritis.ca/newsletter)

**Join the movement to raise \$1 million for the 6 million with arthritis**

SEPTEMBER IS ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH

## Join the movement

This month, you can empower Canadians living with arthritis to say, "Arthritis won't stop me." Our goal is to raise \$1 million for the 6 million with arthritis. You can take part by setting up a virtual fundraiser at [www.arthritis.ca/moveyourway](http://www.arthritis.ca/moveyourway) and challenging others to do the same. Now is the time to raise your voice and join the movement for a future free from arthritis!

**Join our movement to help people say "Arthritis won't stop me"**

### Giving is easy:

**By phone:** 1-855-834-4427

**Online:** [www.arthritis.ca/givenow](http://www.arthritis.ca/givenow)



**THANK YOU** for giving and for your incredible partnership.