

Deadlines:

- For recruitment of graduate students: December 15, March 15, and August 15
- For hiring summer students: March 31

Upcoming Events:

- CRA 2008 Annual Meeting: March 5-8, Mont Tremblant, Quebec
- EULAR 2008 Annual European Congress of Rheumatology: June 11-14, Paris, France

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The first annual scientific meeting: Great Success!

On behalf of the CSRG, we would like to thank all of you who joined us for the first annual scientific meeting in Calgary, Alberta. We would also like to thank all the speakers who devoted their time and effort to share with us their areas of expertise.

Here are a few highlights of this very interesting weekend:

- Friday night consisted of registration, a buffet dinner and an informal meet and greet.
- Saturday's schedule began early in the morning with a series of lectures presented by our great team of doctors, including the rheumatologists from each site. Issues such as renal and lung problems in scleroderma, and quality of life were discussed.
- The CSRG lunch on Saturday was joined with Scleroderma Society of Canada (SSC), allowing our CSRG researchers to interact with patients. The lunch ended with an informative question and answer period for patients.
- The day ended with a delicious dinner at a great Italian restaurant, downtown Calgary.

Sunday's schedule began with a plenary session of presentations given by selected researchers. These were followed by meetings of the specialized working groups and a meeting of the site coordinators. In the afternoon, the members representing the Knowledge translation committee met to discuss ongoing projects, especially the one related to a nationwide SSC patient survey.

Feedback given by the Trainees was generally good. They appreciated the fact that they got to interact with both the specialists and the patients. However, some young researchers being new to this area of research found some of the sessions difficult to understand. In the future, we will have to work on making sure that scientific sessions are understandable by all, and not just by the elite in each of the areas of research. Knowledge translation has to start in our own backyard.

Again, many thanks to all who attended our first scientific meeting and those who took part in the planning

of the meeting. It would not have been the same without you!



Mark it in your calendar!

Next year's Annual Scientific Meeting:

Where: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario

When: Sept. 20-21, 2008

Next year, we will again work with the SSC to make it a very interesting meeting. We hope to involve more CSRG doctors to address patients' concerns during interactive themed workshops (i.e. skin problems and ulcers, gastric/nutritional problems, sexuality and relationships, etc). We will also have a workshop for family and friends of patients with scleroderma.

A note on SARD and their CIHR Team grant proposal

The CSRG is now part of this bigger group: the Systemic Autoimmune Rheumatic Diseases (SARD) research alliance.

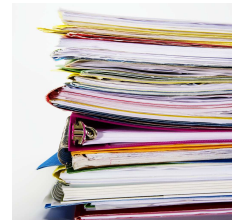
SARDs include diseases such as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, (SLE), Systemic Sclerosis (SSc), Sjögren's disease (SjD) and poly/dermatomyositis (PM/DM).

SARD syndromes are a common medical problem afflicting a considerable portion of the general population.

Although the mechanisms of these disorders are not fully understood, it seems more likely that they share two common elements. First, the clinical features are directly caused by autoantibodies. This was doubted for many years but clarification of the pathways involved indicates that it is almost always the case. Second, the

autoantibodies perpetuate their own production through various means. The goal of the SARD research alliance is to work together to try to find common threads between these autoimmune diseases in order to better understand all these diseases. In the past few months, Dr. Paul R. Fortin, Chair, Canadian Network for Improved Outcomes in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, and Dr. Murray Baron, Director of the CSRG, and a team of researchers have been working on a 30-page grant proposal entitled "Establishment of a New Clinical Research Network: the SARD Research Alliance". This proposal was submitted to the CIHR last week. The SARD team members, along with co-principal applicant and director of the CSRG Dr. Baron, have been showing great support and enthusi-

asm, in the hopes that this grant proposal will be approved in the spring of 2008. The letter of intent was well received and our chances are quite good. This initiative can only contribute to improving scleroderma research in Canada and we keep our fingers crossed for a new opportunity for systemic autoimmune disease research!



"SARD syndromes are a common medical problem afflicting a considerable portion of the general population."

The weekly WEB-courses have started!

If you haven't already done so, take a minute to check out our weekly web-courses! In the hopes of creating a team environment, the web-course program is intended to encourage researchers' long-term interest in doing SSc research. We decided to launch the web-course program in order to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas between researchers and trainees and allow them to participate in each other's projects, as well as provide weekly lectures, training discussions and other ethical issues. These conferences are held on a weekly basis where trainees and mentors are able to communicate with each other, view presentations and share data.

We currently have **24 planned web-lectures** provided by doctors and researchers from Canada and the United States. Although the web courses are intended for mentors and trainees,

anyone who is interested in the content of the course is welcome to attend.

How does the web course work, technologically speaking? Webcams and headsets (or mic) are optional if you are just attending the session, but are required if you need to be seen and heard by the audience. These allow the weekly presenter to be seen and heard by all participants who are connected in the virtual meeting room. The presenter shares the Powerpoint presentation with the participants, who have the presentation displayed on their computer. Every session is ended by a live questions and answers period lead by the presenter.

The lectures are recorded and are available online 24/7 for those who cannot attend the live web-lecture. This is a great way to establish trans-disciplinary

links between basic and clinical research programs.

The first web course began on October 18, as an introduction to clinical aspects of scleroderma. Future lectures will focus on Pathology of scleroderma (Nov. 29), theories of pathogenesis (Dec. 6), and Research Design and Knowledge Management (Dec. 13).

For more questions regarding this program, to see a schedule of the lectures, or if you experience technical difficulties to connect to the web-lectures, please contact Mr. Marwen Naim, our Training coordinator at 514-340-8222 ext 3422.



Did you know?

Our latest CSRG publication is by Dr. Marie Hudson and is entitled "Hypocomplementemia in Systemic Sclerosis—Clinical and Serological Correlations". It has been published in the November issue of *The Journal of Rheumatology*. In this article, hypocomplementemia is looked at in association to SSc. It was investigated whether SSc patients with hypocomplementemia had more features of overlap disease than those with normal complement levels.

The mentorship program, trainees and their projects

Our mentorship program for the 2007-2008 academic year is up and running and the trainees have been selected to work with individual mentors on projects related to the each mentor's area of expertise. We would like to present you with this year's trainees, their mentor and their project.

Trainee: Celeste Loewe • **Mentor:** Dr. Stephan van Eeden, University of British Columbia-Vancouver, BC • **Title of project:** Biomarkers identifying lung involvement in Scleroderma.

Trainee: Yee Yuen Ho • **Mentors:** Dr. John Mort, Shriners Hospital for Children & Dr. Peter Roughley, McGill University-Montreal, QC • **Title of project:** Collagen and proteoglycan metabolism and the fibrotic response.

Trainee: Corinne Coulter • **Mentor:** Dr. Janet Pope, University of Western Ontario-London, ON • **Title of project:** The development of scleroderma classification criteria.

Trainee: Daniele DiCapua • **Mentor:** Dr. Mark Trifiro, McGill University-Montreal, QC • **Title of project:** Somatic vascular markers on scleroderma biopsies.

Trainee: Marilyse Julien • **Mentor:** Dr. Russell Steele, McGill University-Montreal, QC • **Title of**

project: Development of a new Scleroderma disease activity index

Trainee: Nidaa Chokr • **Mentor:** Dr. Marc Servant, Université de Montréal, Dr. Murray Baron, Jewish General Hospital-Montreal, QC • **Title of project:** Characterization of the role(s) of anti-PDGFR auto-antibodies, endothelial and vascular smooth muscle cells in the establishment of pro-inflammatory conditions leading to scleroderma.

Trainee: Orit Schieir • **Mentor:** Dr. Brett Thombs, McGill University and the Jewish General Hospital-Montreal, QC • **Title of project:** A path analysis approach to assessing the longitudinal relationship between pain and symptoms of depression in Scleroderma.

Trainee: Sarah McLean • **Mentor:** Dr. Andrew Leask, University of Western Ontario-London, ON • **Title of project:** Wnt signalling in Scleroderma.

