

Arthritis and Rheumatism International (ARI) Meeting, Baltimore November 13-15, 2003

by: Linda Wilhelm with input by Glen Urquhart
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Arthritis and Rheumatism International (ARI) recently hosted a training session, held in Baltimore, Maryland sponsored by the US Pfizer Foundation. Seventeen countries attended. The focus of the training was capacity building, resource management and advocacy. The Arthritis Society is the official Canadian ARI member organization and nominated BC CAPA member, Glen Urquhart to the ARI council in August of 2001.

The Arthritis Society was invited to send one staff and one volunteer to attend this meeting in addition, to Glen. Lisa Cirella attended the meeting as a staff representative and New Brunswick CAPA member, Linda Wilhelm attended as a volunteer representative.

The Arthritis Foundation (TAF) annual meeting was held concurrently with the ARI meeting. It was disappointing that there was not any Arthritis Foundation volunteer participation at the ARI meeting.

TAS and CAPA attendees shared successes with other countries that believe that a global perspective of arthritis care illuminates strengths as well as areas for improvement. All came away from the exchanges with valuable information on establishing arthritis advocacy initiatives at home.

For a few of us, the highlight of the conference wasn't part of the agenda. It was a surprise invitation to attend an Arthritis Foundation breakfast, where the keynote speaker was the Senator of Maryland. Of course the topic of drug reimportation was raised, as well as the "indisputable" fact that Canadians are never denied access to medical treatment. It was with great difficulty that Linda remained sitting during the speech, but she jumped at the first chance to question the congressman. He answered only a couple of questions. Linda advised him and the audience that indeed, Canadians are denied access to medical care, waiting years longer than our American counterparts to access new medications. Linda also stated, that the U.S. needs to solve their domestic problems with prescription drugs - reimporting drugs from Canada is not a solution. Lastly, Linda said that many patient groups in Canada are advocating for shutting down Internet pharmacies.

ARI is an organization whose members are affected by arthritis and whose activities are volunteer based. Its members network with people with arthritis from around the world. Planning is currently underway for training sessions for countries with less-developed patient organizations. Work has also begun on the 2004 General Meeting. The time and

place will be announced early in the new year. To read the Action Plans developed at the conference, click on <http://ar-i.org/>