

C.A.R.S. Provincial Supervisor 1972 to 1976
by Patricia Grohne

Soon after immigrating to Canada from the UK, in 1971 I was given the job of Senior Physiotherapist on the VGH Orthopaedic wards. The Joint Replacements for hip and knee were fairly new at VGH. There was a weekly combined clinic for pre- and post-op patients held at the Arthritis Centre which I attended as the VGH PT.

My boss, Mrs. Fortune recommended that I apply for a job opening in 1972 as the CARS Provincial Supervisor and I was accepted. This was a job that Pat Phillips had done before me. When Pat left, Pauline Neubauer took over as the CARS PT Supervisor. Pauline had a great deal to do in Vancouver, so delegated much of the travelling to me. I remember Bruce Clark, Gillian Parker and I, being newly arrived together. Bruce was in charge of Education, Gillian was at the Arthritis Program at G.F. Strong, and I was the Assistant Supervisor for the Provincial Program.

The job as Provincial Supervisor was an incredibly interesting one, travelling all over B.C. to visit CARS Physios and going to the hospitals with Shared Programs (the "Shared" Physiotherapists were employed by the hospitals, treated the patients with Arthritis and were given the latest training by CARS). Being the Provincial Supervisor was an amazing experience for someone so newly arrived in Canada, as I travelled throughout BC, visiting every small town and community. My role was to support the out of town CARS and Shared Physiotherapists, visit Service Clubs to give fund raising talks, meet with new hospital administrators about the CARS Shared Programs and reach out to the CARS Community volunteers, all of which was to help increase of visibility of CARS. I remember meeting Ann Gillespie in Quesnel, Joan Burbridge in Kelowna and Joan Paulson in Penticton (sadly all now deceased) as well as many, many others. Those out-of-town physiotherapists used sandbags, made by CARS volunteers, wax baths and Guthrie Smith frames with springs and slings for strength training. Later the volunteers made little one-pound weight bags from lead shot which could be enclosed in a purpose sewn bag, closing with Velcro, around the ankle or wrist to provide for a gradual increase in resistance.

There was a turnover of the CARS Physiotherapists in the rural areas. They were often immigrants like me, who had trained overseas and when they applied to CARS were placed up in the rural areas of BC. Very often, they would meet someone in those less developed areas, get married, leave CARS and start working for the local hospital.

Winter driving up North was dangerous. There was not much traffic on the road in those days, so in the event of an accident, we taught the CARS physiotherapists to carry a blanket, shovel, candle and chocolate bar for emergencies. I remember accompanying one brand new, slightly built English physiotherapist to Prince George. As part of her services, she also needed to drive to Vanderhoof and Burns Lake Hospitals to treat patients there. We went over the winter driving protocol and I encouraged her to carry emergency supplies. On my next visit several months later, I noticed that she had gained a bit of weight. At my inquiry, she sighed and said, "It's those emergency chocolate bars in the glove compartment – they keep calling to me as I drive!"

Before the School was established at UBC, the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society (CARS) relied heavily on overseas trained Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists.

In the early 1970's, there continued to be a shortage of PTs in the rural areas although by that time there were BC graduates as the UBC School of Rehabilitation Medicine graduated the first class in 1964. As CARS Provincial Supervisor, I was asked to undertake a recruitment drive in three cities in the UK, London, Birmingham and Manchester. As I was travelling to the UK for a vacation to see family anyway, I combined the Manpower Recruitment Drive with my vacation. I met with UK Physiotherapists in the three cities, showed them slides of beautiful BC and talked about the rewards of working in Canada.

There was a clinical component to my job as a Provincial Supervisor too, as I accompanied the visiting Rheumatologists from Vancouver for the Follow-Up Clinics, held in smaller communities with no local Rheumatologists. As PTs, we assessed each patient and took measurements of their joints. Sometimes the careful assessment of a patient with severe RA and with multiple joints affected took a very long time. The medications for RA were not nearly as effective in those days so that some of the patients had incredibly disabling deformities. Etched clearly in my memory, is an older patient with ankylosing spondylitis, whose entire spine was flexed into a c-shape with her chin resting on her chest so that she could barely see to walk. It was so sad.

During my time at CARS, Dr. Ken Boyce asked Jane Andrew, a combined OT/PT and I to be part of a provincial committee tasked with designing the protocols for Intermediate Care. At that time, hospital care was divided into Acute care and Extended Care, with nothing in between. Also, when working for CARS, I prepared a brief to the BC Ministry of Health to provide more Physiotherapy on the Queen Charlotte Islands, now renamed Haida Gwaii. I met some interesting people on my trips to the Islands, including someone who was working to separate the Islands as an independent nation from Canada and who had already designed the stamps for his new "Country" of Haida Gwaii!

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