



From the President

13 March 2020

Dear Member

It is with sadness and disappointment I announce that the 2020 Australian Rheumatology Association Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM), scheduled for 16-19 May, at the International Convention Centre (ICC), in Sydney, is cancelled.

During the last few days, in relation to COVID-19, Dr Geraldine Hassett, Local Organising Committee Chair (LOC) for the ASM; Prof Stephen Hall, Chair, ASM Program Committee; Dr Irwin Lim, Sponsor Liaison; and Lara Malcom, The Meeting People, Professional Conference Organiser (PCO), provided the ARA Board their unanimous recommendation that the 2020 ASM should be cancelled.

The most recent available modelling of the effect of COVID-19 on the Australian community suggests a likely peak of infections in mid-May 2020.

Many of you will be aware that most Hospital and Health Services have restricted conference leave for their employees, as have many universities, in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. These restrictions are likely to be in place for some weeks or months.

Some ARA members have non-rheumatology roles (general medicine, geriatrics, teaching) that may be affected and limit ability to attend the ASM, particularly the effects of quarantine, self-isolation or illness.

In addition to this advice, the Board considered the welfare of ARA members, and the importance at this time of a healthy workforce. Our patients need us to be ready, willing and able to assist where we can over the weeks and months ahead.

Many ARA members are small business owners, who are concerned about their own health, and the consequences of business shutdown, in the event of illness, self-isolation or quarantine, the subsequent effect on family members or other staff, and ASM attendee numbers are likely to be low as a result.

Pharmaceutical companies are rapidly limiting business-related travel and interaction, and have voiced concerns about being able to maintain an appropriate level of presence at the ASM.

The Board were therefore unanimous in their decision to cancel the 2020 ARA ASM.

On behalf of the Board I want to thank Geraldine and the LOC for the amazing work they have done to prepare the program and speakers for the meeting. I know that there will be a great deal of disappointment, but these are unforeseen events.

I want to thank our sponsors for their support and hope they understand and agree with our decision.

I ask for your patience over the next few weeks while we resolve the issues caused by the cancellation. Requests for full refunds of registration fees can be directed to lara@themeetingpeople.com.au.

We will attempt to obtain refunds where possible for hotel deposits booked through the PCO and will advise those people directly. We regret we are unable to reimburse any personal expenses incurred by potential attendees such as airfares, hotel bookings etc.

The ARA AGM will need to be held as a web based or virtual meeting. We will provide details as soon as these have been finalised.

There is a recognition that for many members the ASM is an important CPD opportunity, that is no longer available. The Board will be working with members to develop other opportunities through the remainder of the year.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you, your families and friends good health over the coming weeks and months.

Kind regards



Associate Professor Dave Nicholls
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President

cc: Mr Andrew Mills – Arthritis Australia
Prof Lisa Stamp – President, NZRA