

Dr. Rachel Asiniwasis, Dermatologist of the Year

Sabrina Ribau, CSPA's programs manager, sat down and spoke with Dr. Rachel Asiniwasis, CSPA's 2023 Derm of the Year award winner, to hear her story and learn about her plans for the future. Selected as this year's award recipient for the incredible work she's led in Indigenous skin health and the work she does for rural and remote patient communities, both in her clinical practice and through her research, the conversation began with a warm, heart-felt introduction. Dr. Asiniwasis introduced her entire team to me, "I wouldn't be able to get my work done without my team," before getting into our conversation.

How does it feel to be CSPA's dermatologist of the year?

What does it mean to you?

First, I'm very honoured to be accepted for the award. It also kind of coincided with my 10 years in practice. We always talk often in our conferences about what's new in science and what's new in dermatology, but at the end of the day, what's most important is the patients -this is the first time I've had a recognition from patients. We're highlighting the importance of patient-centered care and goes to show me, as someone who's worked 100 hours/week for the last 10 years, that it's all for patient health and wellbeing.

What brought you to dermatology?

I discovered dermatology serendipitously – when I started medical

school, I thought dermatologists were a lab-based scientist, due to coming from a severely underserved region for dermatology. At the end of our second year of medicine, Dr. Peter Hall was our undergraduate lead for the systems. The skin is the sign of internal and external health – we see these internal problems on the skin, and I found the skin really interesting. It was also a conglomeration of all the specialties I really liked – pathology, internal medicine – and on top of it, it's just a highly needed specialty.

I've made it my life and my lifestyle. We can really help people out by knowing the skin. We can help diagnose or bridge care for other medical issues, especially in highly ruralized and remote populations – something I've organically reached out to in my practice.

Can you tell me about a highlight of your work for or with patients?

There are many things I could say, but one of the highlights is engaging in patient support groups, like Eczema Society of Canada [*one of CSPA's Affiliate Members*]. I have been volunteering and working with them since 2015 in various roles. Some of my own patients will even attend the eczema society webinars because they've seen me on them.

The other thing that is important to me at this time in my career is that 40-50% of my population is Indigenous. I'm Indigenous on my father's side, Plains Cree and Saulteaux, and with



my family being around here, over the years I've connected with communities over time. We have been able to develop such strong relationships with some of the southern communities and patients where we have permission from their leadership, allowing us to bridge projects on Indigenous health with dermatology projects, like talking about preferences and values when caring for eczema. The engagement that we've had with some of the communities, we've taken patient care to the next step, and we're now engaging the patients with their voice and are connecting at a level where we can then take them to the stakeholder level and turn it into improving community services. Even as an Indigenous person myself, it took

me years to develop those relationships. We have to get more funding into these communities for skin health.

What's something you're excited about right now?

I'm excited for a few things: I'm excited for how the next phase of my career will go over my next 10 years. Now that I have a full team, we can get a lot more efficient with care and research. I look forward to taking some more time for myself for my own balance now that we have more staff, and I'm also excited for new advances in treatments.

I'm also excited to launch my career as a health researcher – I did my Master's of Science in Health Sciences (MSHS) in Clinical and Translational Research in Washington D.C. over the pandemic.

I did it because I was seeing so many gaps in the literature around the determinants of health, community health, Indigenous and rural care, skin of colour, and I wanted to be able to care for these things more adeptly, and now I'm launching my own research projects through our center.

I'm excited to network nationally and internationally: I love to learn about what others are doing across the world. Instead of reinventing the wheel, why not learn from them.

And of course, continuing to work with my patients and continuing to provide good care.

What's next for you?

I LOVE dermatology. So, I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing, and I'm

going to see what we can build. That's why we call ourselves Origins – there was so little infrastructure that we built it from the ground up. And of course, developing my research career and learning from my peers and colleagues. I keep engaged.

I genuinely appreciate this award, and I look forward to getting more involved with patient engagement and perhaps even engage my patients more on that end too.

And for those who've had the pleasure of working with Dr. Asiniwasis or attending one of her talks, the conversation ended true to style when asked if there was anything else she wanted to share – chatting about her love of cats. ●

Uno

This is Uno. I got her my first month of residency as a rescue from the Toronto Humane Society. She was the first cat I ever had. We became best friends, and she is the one who was there for me through it all! She studied with me, sat with me at all my daily activities, and was an amazing cuddler! She is the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I think about her every day. Her pictures are all over my office and clinic, and one of my patients even painted a picture in honor of her! I also made a point to thank her at my residency graduation as my #1 day to day supporter and she was quite popular in our program!



Jinks

This is Jinks. He is a barn cat rescue from rural Saskatchewan. He is now 3 years old. He is very active, extremely friendly, and likes to be outside in his 'catio' watching birds and nature. He can jump up a tree! He has Uno's hand-me-down stroller and clothing items, and is consistently spoiled by my entire family, especially my parents! He likes to make cameos in my lectures! Jinks loves to play! He is well known for entertaining himself despite being the only cat currently in the household! He has a whole host and array of toys and 'thrones', and is endlessly entertained by my parents who babysit him while I'm at work.

