

What's stopping you?

By Christine Clarke

A family physician recently told me, "People with psoriasis have to get used to it. It's not going away and they just have to live with it." I wasted no time in adjusting her attitude. There are wonderful treatments available for psoriasis. Patients should not give up.

You are the best health advocate to fight for your care, but the journey may not be easy. There are many obstacles on your path to effective treatment. The low and ever-dwindling number of dermatologists is certainly one such barrier.

Supply of dermatologists

How can you find out about and access treatments for your condition if there is no dermatologist for you to talk to? Wait times in Canada are long now and are only going to get worse if swift action is not taken to recruit and retain dermatologists in every part of the country. A survey recently conducted by the CSPA shows that wait times for dermatology, which stood at five weeks in 2001, are now 12 weeks on average.

Provincial governments must be made aware of the need to train and

keep dermatologists within their region. Even now, some medical schools are not providing dermatology training to their general practice students because they can't find dermatologists to teach it.

The current population of dermatology specialists is recognizing that when they retire, there will be no one to send their patients to. People who don't live in major metropolitan areas, and even some who do, simply cannot find a dermatologist.

Available treatment options

Once you have managed to see a specialist, will the best treatment for you be available or will your local hospital be cutting off access? Phototherapy facilities across the country are closing, even though phototherapy has been proven to be an effective, non-invasive, non-pharmaceutical treatment for a variety of skin diseases.


Will your doctor even tell you about the latest pharmaceutical treatments if he or she knows you can't afford them

and your government is unwilling to provide funding? Some drugs that are considered to be the "standard of care" by doctors are difficult, if not impossible, to get coverage for from provincial or territorial drug plans.

Inform yourself and speak up

The CSPA has produced a Report Card on access issues across the country. Visit our website at www.canadianskin.ca and click on the "Advocacy" tab to view the report. Now we need you to speak up.

We've made it easy for you, with pre-written letters with which you can contact your government. Simply insert your contact information. Or you can write your own letter in our system and we will mail it to the right person. Please encourage your family and friends to do the same. Governments need to understand that this is important! Only by hearing from people like you will they get the message. Help us to help you.

Contact the CSPA if you are having a specific problem accessing care or a treatment and we will see if we can help. Now that you know what some of the barriers to getting treatment are, what's stopping you? 

Christine Clarke is a member of the Board of the CSPA and chairs the Advocacy Committee.

What is advocacy?

- Getting relevant information on a given issue to our elected representatives.
- Human voices are the most important and accurate source of this information.
- Policy makers need to hear both objective facts and subjective stories in order to understand what it feels like to live with a skin disease.

