



October 26, 2019

Re: Service on the safety of medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Dear Dr. B. Anthony Armson & Dr. Jennifer Blake,

On behalf of the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance (CAPA), I was pleased to [learn](#) that your organization is planning to offer a service on the safety of medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

People with inflammatory arthritis (IA) are diagnosed in the prime of their lives with far-reaching impact on all aspects of life including pregnancy decisions. An important part of making this decision is understanding the impact of medications on pregnancy. For people with IA, a number of medications are needed to provide adequate control of their disease and all too often, these medications are not adequately studied during pregnancy and breastfeeding. A CAPA-led [survey](#) on pregnancy and parenting found that 88% of people with arthritis indicated a high need for information about medication safety during pregnancy while 82% identified a need for medication information during breastfeeding. Access to and reliability of information is lacking, thus representing a significant unmet need of people living with IA in

The Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance is a grass-roots, patient driven, independent, national organization with members across Canada and supporters in Canada and beyond. We believe the first expert on arthritis is the individual who lives with. We provide a strong voice and concerted effort to promote the well-being of people living with arthritis and we assist our members to become advocates not only for themselves but for all people with arthritis.

Canada. This is why our organization has taken the initiative by developing evidence-based [educational resources](#) to support people with IA navigate family planning and pregnancy. Your organization's plans to offer a service on medication safety during pregnancy would be a welcome addition to our educational resources and provide much-needed knowledge to better support people during pregnancy.

I can personally attest to the challenges in accessing reliable, high quality information during my four pregnancies while living with Rheumatoid Arthritis. My journey began at an appointment with my family doctor who, upon learning that I wanted to have a child, referred me for pre-pregnancy counselling. I left the counselling session with a long list of warnings about what the medications could do to a growing fetus or that they didn't actually know what the medications could do. Through interactions with various physicians and almost by chance, I also learned that some medications had an impact on my ability to conceive (e.g. Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Medications). The lack of reliable information places significant stress on people living with IA and their families at a time of life considered to be full of possibility and joy.

The lack of adequate medication information puts the health of Canadian mothers and children at risk and makes it almost impossible to make an informed decision. Many women decide to reduce or stop taking their medications putting their health and the health of their babies at risk. During the pregnancy



for my second child, I stopped taking my medications and took Prednisone because it was one of the few medications with an established safety record. My health deteriorated to an extreme where previously undiagnosed disease complications surfaced and my son and I nearly died.

We need to do better in supporting women taking medicines during pregnancy and breastfeeding. We ask that you take a leadership role and implement plans for a service on medication use during pregnancy and breastfeeding. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laurie Proulx".

Laurie Proulx
2nd Vice-President
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance
www.arthritispatient.ca