

Rheumatology: EULAR contributes 70 years to the field of RMDs

The European League Against Rheumatism is marking its 70th Anniversary in 2017

Kilchberg, Switzerland, 3 April, 2017 – The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR), an umbrella organisation which represents scientific medical societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases throughout Europe has reached a milestone in its remarkable contributions to an emerging area of medicine, namely rheumatology.

Welcoming this milestone year in 2017, EULAR President Professor Gerd R. Burmester from the Charité – University Medicine Berlin comments, “Progress in rheumatology has been remarkable in the last 70 years, impacting favourably on quality of life for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. Since 1947, EULAR has continuously fostered excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. The remarkable development of EULAR as an organisation parallels the amazing progress in this field of medicine. Many of the disabling and often deadly diseases from earlier years have become manageable in a way that allows affected individuals to lead an almost normal life”.

Progress in rheumatology has been driven mainly by the development of anti-inflammatory, immune modulating and disease modifying drugs. This started with the introduction of glucocorticoids in the late 1940s (1948). Another breakthrough was the first application of methotrexate, a disease modifying drug in rheumatoid arthritis patients in the 1960s. Even today, glucocorticoids and methotrexate remain pillars in the management of chronic inflammatory diseases. The “invention” of monoclonal antibodies in 1975 was a further milestone which led to the development of specifically designed drugs (target drugs), such as the TNF-alpha-inhibitors, which then became available for the treatment of many patients with RMDs during the late 1990s and 2000s. Other so-called ‘biologicals’ followed and contributed to the broad range of targeted therapies in rheumatology available today. A second key advance was the recognition that early diagnosis and treatment that is targeted on remission leads to substantially better outcomes. In addition, recent advances in imaging and specific biomarkers for the early diagnosis and follow-up of the diseases have recently become available in the field of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases.

Although many of the diseases cannot be healed or cured as yet affected people can, if properly treated, lead a normal life, stay in work and look forward to normal life expectancy. In addition to the advances in the pharmacologic and strategic management of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases, surgical, physical and occupational therapies have also contributed to the significant progress in maintaining patients’ quality of life. For example, total joint replacement has become a very relevant option for people with severe osteoarthritis of the hip or the knee. New, minimally invasive surgical strategies enrich the therapeutic spectrum and mesenchymal stem cell transplantation may in future presage reparative therapies.

EULAR was founded in 1947 and held its first European Rheumatology Congress in September 1947 in Copenhagen with 200 delegates from 16 countries. For the upcoming 2017 congress in Madrid, EULAR expects approximately 14,000 delegates from more than 120 countries. With 45 scientific member societies, 36 national organisations of people with arthritis/rheumatism (PARE) and 23 health professional associations of all the European nations, EULAR underscores the importance of combating rheumatic diseases not only by medical means, but also through a wider context of care for rheumatic patients and a thorough understanding of their social and other needs.

"Thirty years ago I saw wheelchairs everywhere in the department in which I worked – today, I see none", concludes EULAR president-elect Professor Johannes Bijlsma from Utrecht, The Netherlands, "We cordially invite you to join the EULAR 2017 Congress in Madrid from 14 to 17 June and celebrate with us EULAR's 70th anniversary – and its contribution to the lives of millions of people affected by rheumatic diseases."

About Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases

Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) are a diverse group of diseases that commonly affect the joints, but can also affect the muscles, other tissues and internal organs. There are more than 200 different RMDs, affecting both children and adults. They are usually caused by problems of the immune system, inflammation, infections or gradual deterioration of joints, muscle and bones. Many of these diseases are long term and worsen over time. They are typically painful and limit function. In severe cases, RMDs can result in significant disability, having a major impact on both quality of life and life expectancy.

About EULAR

EULAR is an umbrella organisation which represents scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases throughout Europe. EULAR aims to reduce the burden of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with musculoskeletal diseases by the governing bodies in Europe through advocacy action.

Contact

Julia Rautenstrauch, EULAR Executive Director
Julia.rautenstrauch@eular.org
www.eular.org