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Annual European Congress of Rheumatology (EULAR) 2017

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EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH RHEUMATIC AND MUSCULOSKELETAL DISEASES AND EMPLOYERS CAN IMPROVE ABILITY TO WORK

Increase in employees' self-confidence in their work ability and
awareness of which limitations were solvable

Madrid, Spain, 16 June 2017: The results of an educational programme implemented by the Galician Rheumatology League (LRG), presented today at the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology (EULAR) 2017, showed that providing education and advice to people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease (RMD) and their employers can make a significant difference to the ability to work.¹

Each employee with an RMD had 1 session with a psychologist and 1 session with an occupational therapist to identify their individual difficulties in continuing to be active at work. Peer support from the LRG was also key in creating a secure environment for employees, who found relief in seeing other people with RMDs maintain a sustainable work life.¹

An LRG health professional also gave personalised advice to employers about RMDs, the specific needs of these employees, how to make it easier for them to stay at work, and how to minimise their work difficulties due to their chronic condition.¹

“Most employers lack information on how RMDs interfere with an employee's ability to work and how best to make the necessary adaptations to not lose this person from their workforce,” said lead author Mr. Francisco Javier Carreira Roca from Liga Reumatológica Española (Spanish Rheumatology League), Madrid, Spain. “Our programme has demonstrated that these kinds of actions can increase the number of employees with RMD in work,” he explained.

The Eurobarometer states that over one-fifth (22%) of the general population currently has, or has previously experienced long-term muscle, bone and joint problems, such as rheumatism and arthritis.² This means that 10 million people are affected in Spain, and more than 600,000 people in the autonomous region of Galicia where the LRG works.



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Around 50% of people with RMDs are currently unemployed because of their condition; only some of them have the legal work incapacity recognised and receive a pension.³ This means that RMDs not only affect health, but also socio-economic status. Most of these people could stay at work and are willing to do so if some arrangements are made like cutting down hours, work place adaptations, and a flexible schedule.⁴

During 2016, out of 14 employees included in this pilot programme, 5 could stay at work or return to work. "Because of our programme, there was an increase in the employees' self-confidence in their capacity to stay at work, and their awareness about which of their limitations were solvable," Mr. Carreira Roca added.

The key objectives of the LRG programme were:

- To make the employer more aware of the positive aspects of keeping all employees including people with RMDs not just at the work place but at full capacity, to avoid both absenteeism and presenteeism
- To help the employer know more about the specific needs of people with RMDs and the necessary adaptations for each of them
- Keep people with RMDs at work with the best possible conditions for both the employee and the employer, as efficiently as possible

The programme included an occupational therapist who has treated the employee and knows about their needs, going to their work place to view the actual conditions, identify manageable obstacles and talk to the employer. An architect specialised in accessibility then offers specific architectural and ergonomic solutions to make the necessary adaptations to the work place.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

For further information on this study, or to request an interview with the study lead, please do not hesitate to contact the EULAR congress Press Office in the Goya Room at the IFEMA, Madrid during EULAR 2017 or on:

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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 'Don't Delay, Connect Today!'

'Don't Delay, Connect Today!' is a EULAR initiative that unites the voices of its three pillars, patient (PARE) organisations, scientific member societies and health professional associations - as well as its international network - with the goal of highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and access to treatment. In Europe alone, over 120 million people are currently living with a rheumatic disease (RMD), with many cases undetected. The 'Don't Delay, Connect Today' campaign aims to highlight that early diagnosis of RMDs and access to treatment can prevent further damage, and also reduce the burden on individual life and society as a whole.

About EULAR

The European League Against Rheumatism (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.

To find out more about the activities of EULAR, visit: www.eular.org



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References

¹ Carreira Roca FJ, Vázquez Lojo AI, Romero Pazos V, on behalf of LIRE, LRG, and LIRE-LRG respectively. Consulting services to employers of people with RMDS. EULAR 2017; Madrid: Abstract OP0318-PARE

² Health in the European Union – Special Eurobarometer: section 1.3. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_272e_en.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2017]

³ Klak A, Raciborski F, Samel-Kowalik P. Social implications of rheumatic diseases. *Reumatologia* 2016; 54(2): 73–78

⁴ Bevan, S., Passmore, E., Mahdon, M. (2007). Fit for Work? Musculoskeletal Disorders and Labour Market Participation. UK: The Work Foundation. Available at http://www.fitforworkeurope.eu/website-documents/44_fit_for_work_small.pdf [Accessed on 22 May 2017]