

EULAR
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ADDRESSING PAIN IN RHEUMATIC DISEASE: OPIOIDS AND OTHER STRATEGIES

New data presented at the EULAR Congress in Copenhagen

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Pain is an important consideration for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs), which can restrict function and limit daily activities. Indeed, low back pain has been the leading cause of disability worldwide for the past 30 years. Opioid prescribing has contributed to a North American epidemic, with increasing trends in several European countries. RMDs are one of the most common indications for prescribed opioids, but there is being little evidence on their benefit. Several abstracts presented at the 2022 EULAR Congress aimed to address this knowledge gap, and develop other pain-relief strategies to reduce this chronic health burden.

Patients with RMDs often suffer from recurrent pain, restricted function and reduction of daily activities. The current standard of intra-articular therapy is the injection of steroids, which can increase risk of infection, cartilage degenerations, and other well-known systemic side effects.

Dr Hiltrun Haibel and colleagues investigated a novel approach focused on the activation of peripheral opioid receptors, using small, systemically inactive doses of morphine. Adult patients with chronic knee arthritis and a high level of pain at baseline received a single dose of either morphine, steroid, or placebo – all delivered via intra-articular injection.

The results showed that a single dose of 3 mg intra-articular morphine did not lead to significant pain improvements in comparison to placebo, and was inferior to steroid at day 7. These data do not support the use of intra-articular morphine for pain reduction in patients with chronic arthritis.

In another abstract at the Congress, Dr Joyce (Yun-Ting) Huang presents UK opioid prescribing trends in new users with one of six RMDs: rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA), axial spondyloarthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, osteoarthritis, or fibromyalgia.

The results show an increased in new opioid users among people with RA, PsA and fibromyalgia since 2006. However, a slight decrease in the trends of new opioid users among most RMDs after 2018 may reflect an increasing awareness of the opioid epidemic. The high proportions of long-term opioid users in RA and fibromyalgia patients highlight the importance of exploring the safety of long-term opioid use and effective pain interventions for patients with RMDs.

In 2019, low back pain was responsible for 64 million years lived with disability (YLDs). Dr Jacek Kopec shared findings from a microsimulation model looking at the impact of three strategies for reducing this burden: weight loss, ergonomic interventions, and an exercise program. The results show that a one unit reduction in body mass index (BMI) per year among overweight and obese individuals would be approximately equivalent in terms of disability reduction to an effective ergonomic intervention in 35% of at-risk workers, and an exercise intervention in 27% of eligible patients with back problems over the same period. This is the first population-based

microsimulation study to compare currently available preventive strategies for low back pain in terms of YLDs averted, and to provide measures of equivalence between these strategies.

Source

Haibel H, et al. Intraarticular morphine in chronic knee-arthritis – results of a randomized placebo-controlled trial. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0050.

Huang J (Y-T), et al. Trends for opioid prescriptions among patients with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases between 2006–2020. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0051.

Kopec J, et al. Reducing the burden of low back pain: results from a new microsimulation model. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0054.

About EULAR

EULAR – the European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology – is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of RMDs. 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 RMDs by the EU institutions through advocacy action.

About the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology

Since its introduction in 2000, the annual EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology has become the primary platform for exchange of scientific and clinical information in Europe. It is also a renowned forum for interaction between medical doctors, scientists, people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry worldwide. The EULAR congress is usually held in June in one of the major cities in Europe.

The scientific programme covers a wide range of topics on clinical innovations, clinical, translational and basic science. Meetings set up by associations of people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and the health care industry complement the programme. The poster sessions, offering lively interaction between presenters and participants, are regarded by many as the heart of the congress.

Over the years, the EULAR Congress has gained a reputation of being a most innovative platform for the practicing physician particularly with respect to the acquisition of information on novel clinical research. The congress attracts more than 18,000 delegates from more than 130 countries.

The aim of the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology is to provide a forum of the highest standard for scientific, both clinical and basic, educational, and social exchange between professionals involved in rheumatology, liaising with patient organisations, in order to achieve progress in the clinical care of people with rheumatic diseases.

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