

Initiative for the initiation of a Study Group on the preclinical and earliest clinically apparent phases of RA (SGPCRA) under the auspices of the EULAR Standing Committee of Investigative Research (ESCIR).

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The preclinical and earliest clinically apparent phases of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) are likely to represent important therapeutic windows within which clinical outcomes can be dramatically modulated. The SGPCRA aims to build an **international network of excellence** to facilitate **collaborations** and **exchange knowledge** about these phases of RA within Europe.

The Study Group will provide a platform through which investigators can:

1. Study **mechanisms** involved in specific stages of the disease progression.
2. Identify and assess **biomarkers**, including genetic, molecular, cellular and imaging biomarkers, relevant to disease progression and outcome.
3. Develop **natural history studies** that operate across **currently available cohorts**.
4. Develop mechanisms to establish **new cohorts** to address specific aims as defined by the SGPCRA.
5. Develop and assess **novel intervention strategies** and **therapeutic agents** within these phases of disease.

The SGPCRA will bring EULAR in this rapidly expanding area, widely recognised to be an important new frontier in the field of RA. To achieve this goal, SGPCRA will bring together expertises from all leading research institutes who want to participate from various member states in relevant fields within Europe. The SGPCRA will be open for all active institutes and it is anticipated that the membership will expand over time. Meetings will be connected to the EWRR and EULAR.

The specific aims of the study group are to (in development):

- Develop a more accurate understanding of the mechanisms driving the immunological abnormalities seen during the preclinical phase of RA and the stimuli which turn such abnormalities into a joint-centric disease.
- Develop a more accurate understanding of the pathogenic mechanisms operating within the joint during the transition from systemic immune disturbance to joint pathology.
- Develop strategies to study disease processes in non-articular tissues (e.g. bone marrow and lymph node) and systems (e.g. neuroendocrine) which may be relevant to disease development and progression.
- Develop intervention protocols based upon an understanding of disease mechanisms operating during relevant phases of disease.
- Work with other ESCIR study groups including the animal model study group and the synovitis study group to develop innovative strategies to address clinically relevant question in preclinical and early RA.
- Exchange knowledge and facilitate standardisation on different technical platforms relevant to these phases of disease, including synovial tissue

acquisition, processing and assessment and imaging strategies including MRI and ultrasound.

- Activate new collaborations within Europe. In particular the group will look to ways to facilitate collaboration in natural history and therapeutic studies within an environment with varied regulatory requirements across participating countries.
- Work with print and other media to raise awareness of the earliest phases of RA, and of RA risk and the importance and benefit of early intervention amongst the general population and relevant political groupings.