

MEDIA RELEASE

European Parliament Interest Group created to tackle the growing burden of rheumatic and Musculoskeletal diseases

Brussels, 13 October 2009 – A cross-party, pan European interest group on rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases was launched today at the European Parliament to address the enormous social and economic burden these conditions place on society. Rheumatic diseases cover more than 200 musculoskeletal conditions and affect over 100 million people of all ages in Europe. The interest group aims to raise awareness of rheumatic diseases and look at what initiatives and legislation the European Parliament and other EU institutions could take to ensure people with rheumatic diseases are more integrated into society.

The launch of the interest group was hosted by Edite Estrela, MEP from Portugal.

“Our intention is to raise the visibility of rheumatic diseases at a European level and ensure that rheumatic diseases are placed on the agendas of European policy makers”, says Edite Estrela, who will lead the group.

“Rheumatic diseases affect people of all ages and nearly 20 percent of the European population. I welcome the efforts of the European Parliament to ensure that people with rheumatic diseases benefit from best practices available in the EU,” said Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, who attended the launch of the interest group.

“Action must be taken now to ensure that people with musculoskeletal diseases are given every opportunity to access the most appropriate treatments and therapies,” Professor Paul Emery, President of EULAR said. “Researchers deserve better support than in the past to advance scientific development”, Emery added.

“The creation of the new group sends a strong message to the 100 million people with rheumatic diseases in Europe that our needs are finally being addressed by policy makers systematically, to enhance the medical and social support we need to lead full and independent lives,” added Neil Betteridge, Vice President of EULAR.

For 2009/10 EULAR is focusing its World Arthritis Day campaign on work and rheumatic diseases. An international World Arthritis Day survey amongst employers, people with rheumatic diseases and health professionals revealed that almost half of people with rheumatic diseases reported difficulties finding work because of their condition. Of all employers surveyed, almost 70 percent of employers admitted to gain a better understanding of the needs of people with rheumatic diseases would be most or very important.

A Charter for Work for People with rheumatic diseases was launched at the Alliance Against Arthritis event in Brussels in March this year, and EULAR will further be developing minimum standards for work to help address employers’ lack of understanding about the rheumatic diseases and those affected by them.

Also being launched by Jim Higgins MEP at the European Parliament on 13 October was a new exhibition celebrating the positive contribution people with rheumatic diseases can make to work. This will next be displayed at the EULAR Autumn Conference for people with arthritis/rheumatism in Europe, which will be held in Tallinn, Estonia in November 2009.



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For more information about EULAR please visit: www.eular.org, www.worldarthritisday.org

About the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR): EULAR represents the whole spectrum of European organisations with an interest in the rheumatic diseases: the scientific societies, the patient associations and the health professionals. Since 1947, EULAR aims to reduce the burden of rheumatic diseases on the individual and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal diseases.

About Rheumatic diseases: Rheumatic diseases are also called musculoskeletal diseases. Among them are inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, diseases of the cartilage and bone such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, diseases of the spine such as back pain and ankylosing spondylitis. Rheumatic diseases can also affect internal organs. They are all characterized by reduction or even loss of physical function that may lead to disability. Indeed, rheumatic diseases are the single largest cause of early retirement and sick leave. Thus musculoskeletal disease is the most expensive disease area in the European Union. Improving the outcome of, and finding the mechanisms that lead to, these diseases is a major challenge for the EU.

About the World Arthritis Day online Survey and Let's Work together projects: The World Arthritis Day survey is a project run by EULAR. Every year the survey looks at different aspects of arthritis/rheumatism and generates statistics to support a call for better standards of treatment and care for people with arthritis/rheumatism. This year's 'Let's Work Together' theme considers the challenges of work, be it paid employment, voluntary work or work at home supporting a family. The survey embraces people with rheumatic diseases, healthcare professionals and employers and aims to increase understanding and cooperation between these groups.