

‘RheumaMap’ launched in Brussels: EULAR calls for increased support for research excellence in rheumatology

Brussels, Belgium, 10 May 2017 – In a meeting of the Interest Group on Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases (RMDs), the *“Research Roadmap to transform the lives of people with Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases”* was launched in the European Parliament. The RheumaMap, which has been designed as a ‘research roadmap’, was researched and put together by the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) drawing on the expertise of the European RMD community, from scientific societies to health professional and patient organisations. For many of the over 200 RMDs – where very often there is no cure available – it defines the key issues to tackle through prioritisation of research funding at national and European level.

Speaking at the European Parliament, EULAR President-Elect Professor Hans Bijlsma said: *“Even though the burden of RMDs is well-recognised, there is still a substantial funding gap for the urgently required research at national and European level. The RheumaMap has true potential to help bring about change; it is a tool that can lead to a better life for European citizens with RMDs and also have positive impact on the long-term sustainability of European health and social security systems.”*

The meeting brought together key players from the EU institutions and stakeholders to the European Parliament to discuss the long-term future of medical research. It included the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, as well as representatives from the EU-funded Innovative Medicines Initiative and the Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe and Members of the European Parliament.

The chair of the Interest Group, Roberta Metsola, Member of the European Parliament, called for action: *“With the development of the next research framework programme underway and the creation of a social pillar for the EU, the European Commission needs to recognise the substantial challenge that RMDs pose for Europe. As chair of the Interest Group on RMDs, I call for decisive action and increased focus in research funding for these diseases and recognition of the unmet needs identified in the RheumaMap”.*

The RheumaMap was developed by EULAR under the leadership of Professor Iain McInnes, EULAR Treasurer, who led a task force of international experts from the field of rheumatology within Europe to develop the document. Professor McInnes describes it as a key tool for change: *“The RheumaMap lays out the need to develop a long-term strategy to effectively reduce the burden of RMDs, which still affect every fourth European citizen, totalling approximately 120 million people. This document, which is testament to the tremendous power of team work, identifies the unmet needs and main challenges in research and innovation in RMDs – and it proposes key areas where long-term strategic efforts can help reduce the enormous burden of these conditions in Europe.”*

The World Health Organisation recently recognised RMDs as Non-Communicable Diseases that can lead to substantial costs for European healthcare and social security systems across Europe, impacting on the economy and business as a result. Welcoming this recent move by the WHO, Neil Betteridge, member of the RheumaMap task force, comments, *“RMDs are among some of the most prevalent, disabling and burdensome diseases. The RheumaMap is an important tool for contributing to the*

development of a Europe that recognises the importance of including the active participation of people with RMDs in all areas of life.”

About EULAR

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with 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 RMDs

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.

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