

eular

The value of RMD prevention at
work: EU-OSHA Campaign
Partner Good Practice Exchange

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EULAR President.



EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR RHEUMATOLOGY

1. About EULAR: Our mission

- EULAR aims to reduce the impact of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) on the individual and society and to improve the social position and the quality of life of people with RMDs in Europe.
- EULAR stimulates, promotes and supports education, research, prevention and treatment of RMDs.

Representing 45 nations



EULAR Members

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27
Corporate
members

45
Scientific
societies

36
People with
Arthritis and
Rheumatism in
Europe
(EULAR PARE)
organisations

24
Health
Professionals in
Rheumatology
(EULAR HPR)
associations

Individual memberships to open as of 2022

OUR COMMUNITIES

In furtherance of our mission's aims, EULAR is supported on its activities by the following communities:

EMEUNET



An exciting community that started its activities in 2009, emanating from one of the objectives set by EULAR – *"Bring on board high quality, young generation contributors in all EULAR activities"*.

EULAR HPR



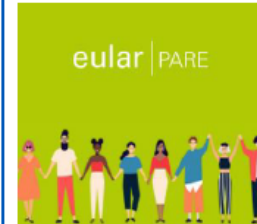
The network of national organisations of Health Professionals in Rheumatology across Europe, it serves as platform for collaboration and shared information among the different health professionals working with rheumatology. The Community's aim is to promote multidisciplinary collaboration in the treatment of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases in Europe.

EULAR PAED



A specialty concerned with the care and understanding of a wide spectrum of autoimmune and auto-inflammatory diseases affecting children and young people.

EULAR PARE



The network of national organisations of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism across Europe, united to ensure the voice of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) is heard and has influence among decision makers within Europe, and create powerful alliances that will make a difference to their lives.

7. EULAR and work

- EULAR is committed to a comprehensive agenda for the benefit of people living with RMDs; EULAR strategy aims to increase the participation of people living with RMDs in work by 2023.
- Have a shared interest with EU-OSHA in mitigating human, economic and societal impact of people with RMDs in the workplace.
- Proud to be sponsor of ‘Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load’ campaign.

8.1 What are RMDs?

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.

8.2 What are RMDs?

- RMDs chronic conditions that may worsen over time. RMDs can be caused or exacerbated by work – for example back pain, neck pain, repetitive strain injury– but also generated by conditions which may arise from non-work-related factors, most notably inflammation.
- There are two types of RMDs: mechanical and inflammatory, requiring both non-pharmacological and pharmacological approaches for treatment.
- Delays in diagnosis and treatment are frequent and can result in significant disability, including irreversible damage to joints, tissues and organs, as well as decreased life expectancy. However, early diagnosis and appropriate treatment, can minimise symptoms, improve quality of life and prevent disability.
- RMDs can be for some aspects considered interchangeable with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). However, there is an important difference between the two definitions. RMDs more fully recognises inflammatory diseases - MSD definition is predominantly focused on degenerative/mechanical disease.

9. Millions of people in Europe suffer from RMDs

- RMDs amongst world's most prevalent, disabling, and burdensome NCDs, affecting over 100 million Europeans, and are the largest cause of disability.
- Rheumatoid arthritis affects approximately 1 in 100 persons worldwide, with an incidence 3-4 times higher in females than in males.
- Just over one-fifth (22%) of EU population reported current or long-term muscle, bone and joint problems.
- RMDs mistakenly considered an old-person's disease, however they affect young and working age population in large numbers.
- RMDs are the biggest cause of disability and reduced mobility in Europe.
- RMDs are an invisible cause of disability, the disabling impact of inflammatory RMDs is variable, and people don't associate RMDs with disability.

10. Access to work

- RMDs the main occupational disease, representing 38% of occupational diseases and accounting for about 60% of health problems in the workplace.
- Many RMDs remain 'invisible' despite the fact that they may impact on people's functional ability and performance.
- Many people are fearful of informing their employers of their condition.
 - 1 in 3 with long-term conditions have not discussed their condition with their employer.
- Many people do not receive the optimum workplace support, from ergonomic seating to flexible working hours, to help them best manage their illness.
- This can increase stressors on the body and exacerbate the symptoms and absenteeism.
- Over 2.9 million people in Europe have rheumatoid arthritis (RA), many of working age. Every third person with RA may become work disabled. Up to 40 per cent leave work completely within 5 years of diagnosis.

11. Economic, societal and human costs

- Total cost of work-related RMDs in Europe is estimated at over € 163bn – 33% attributed to productivity loss and turnover costs for employers (33%)
- RMDs are biggest cause of sick leave and premature retirement due to physical disability in Europe.
- Exclusion of people with RMDs from workplace affects finances, self-esteem, and mental health.
- Exclusion associated with poorer health, higher rates of consultation in primary care, indebtedness and mortality.
- Family members acting as primary care givers also impacts household finances

12. COVID-19: new workplace challenges

- Patients with inflammatory RMDs (those taking high doses of glucocorticoids and immunosuppressants) very concerned about whether they should continue their treatments.
- Many face very difficult dilemma: whether to return to work if they are employed in healthcare or other professions with direct human contact, or commute using public transport.
- Pandemic has exposed vulnerability of RMD sufferers to workplace exclusion.
- COVID-19 has shown us that for white collar workers telework and flexible work patterns can work for both people with RMDs and employers. Blue collar workers need more support.

13. Impact on business

- Human capital is most important asset for any business.
- Increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, early retirement and staff turnover impact on performance and success of any company.
- Business has a moral and financial interest in recognising and successfully addressing RMDs.

14. Prevention and effective management of RMDs: creating an open, supportive and flexible culture and workplace

- Workplaces can help prevent the development of mechanical RMDs and support those affected by inflammatory RMDs.
- People with RMDs must feel comfortable to seek early diagnosis and treatment, and empowered to discuss their conditions. They must also be aware of need for early diagnosis.
- Put a system in place for workers to report symptoms as soon as they arise.
- Work with employees to proactively look for hazards, screen for early signs of work-related RMDs, and implement preventive measures.
- Create ergonomic workplaces to increase comfort for people with mechanical RMDs and flareups for people with inflammatory RMDs.

15. Prevention and effective management of RMDs: creating an open, supportive and flexible culture and workplace

- A workplace culture that supports people with RMDs is essential.
- Adopt zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, including hiring practices, and promote flexible work schedules and shift patterns, annualized hour schemes and tele-working.
- Implement return to work strategy based on joined-up approach involving all relevant actors, including healthcare provider, employer, line manager and the worker.
- Change the psychology: focus on what they can do – not what they cannot
- Employers to introduce policies and programmes which recognize and address the needs of people with RMDs.

The EULAR Campaign: 'Don't Delay, Connect Today and Time2Work

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16. How EULAR can help

- Pan-European network of RMD medical societies, healthcare professionals and patient organisations.
- EULAR can put you in contact the relevant organisation within your country.
- Contact:
- Professor Annamaria Iagnocco, EULAR President
- eular@eular.org

