Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases: Improving the quality of life for more than 100 million EU citizens

Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (MSKD) as a major health issue in Europe

- Rheumatic and musculoskeletal disorders comprise all painful conditions of the musculoskeletal system.
- More than 200 different disorders have been identified: various types of degenerative joint and soft tissue disorders, osteoporosis, arthritis and systemic connective tissue diseases.
- Rheumatic conditions affect the joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Some of these disorders also involve internal organs.
- Common symptoms are pain, swelling, and stiffness.

An increasing impact on the life of individuals and society

MSKD – The human and financial consequences

- Musculoskeletal diseases affect more than one in four Europeans of all ages (more than 100 million European citizens).
- MSKD are the single greatest cause for physical disability, resulting in unemployment in 50% of cases and cause of 60% of people in long-term sick leave.
- MSKD cause the single greatest socioeconomic cost due to long-term work absence and the payment of disability benefits. The economic burden is estimated to be more than 240 billion Euros per year in the EU.
- MSKD are the most common cause for long-term pain.
- People with MSKD have limitations to their independence as individuals and face attitudes that limit their full participation in society.

What the EU Member States and the EU institutions can do

EU Member States and EU institutions can play a pivotal role in promoting the highest possible quality of life for the more than 100 million EU citizens living with musculoskeletal disease by focusing on:

- Rights and social inclusion: People with disabilities related to MSKD should have the same rights as any other European Union citizens. The European Union and the Member States shall ensure full inclusion in society optimising environmental and life-style factors, respecting the right to work and to remain mobile.
- Patient involvement/patient empowerment: People with MSKD are experts in living with their conditions and should therefore be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of their environment, services and products.
- Prevention: A holistic, patient-centred, multi-sectoral, and multidisciplinary management approach to people with musculoskeletal diseases is needed, specifically emphasizing primary and secondary prevention, involving community care, social services and education services.
- Evidence-based practices: Treatment and management of MSKD shall be in accordance with evidence-based recommendations in every EU Member State. People with MSKD should receive early referral to, and rapid diagnosis by, well-trained physicians, ideally in specialised centres, thus minimising long-term disability.
- Research: EU Member States and EU institutions shall make research on MSKD a priority given that there is insufficient information regarding the causes and predictors of these life-long diseases.

The Belgian EU Presidency and its focus on chronic diseases and rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases

The Ministerial Conference “Innovative approaches for chronic illnesses in public health and health systems”, held in Brussels on 20 October 2010, is the key event addressing chronic illnesses during the Belgian EU Presidency.

The EU Presidency Conference on “Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases: lessons for innovative policy making in the European Union”, organised in collaboration with EULAR on 19 October 2010 as a pre-conference to the Ministerial Conference, reflects our mutual interest in developing conclusions and specific policy recommendations in the area of prevention, treatment, management and research of MSKD and other chronic disorders.

About EULAR, the European League Against Rheumatism

EULAR is the European umbrella organisation which represents scientific societies, health professionals associations and organisations of people with arthritis/rheumatism throughout Europe.

The aims of EULAR are to reduce the burden of rheumatic diseases on the individual and society and to improve the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal diseases.

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 musculoskeletal diseases by the governing bodies in Europe.

EULAR underscores the importance of combating rheumatic diseases not only by medical means, but also through a wider context of care for rheumatic patients and a thorough understanding of their social and other needs.

To learn more about MSKD please visit www.eular.org or contact us directly:

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