PRESS RELEASE

EULAR welcomes Council action to tackle chronic diseases

Brussels, 8 December 2010

The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) welcomes the outcomes of yesterday’s Council of the European Union (EPSCO Council). In its meeting on 7 December, ministers for health adopted Council Conclusions on chronic diseases, in which the Council calls on Member States and the European Commission to adopt concrete, coordinated measures to tackle chronic diseases in Europe. EULAR is pleased to note that the Council Conclusions reflect many of the recommendations made at the 19 October Presidency conference on Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal diseases. The conference was organised jointly by the Presidency and EULAR.

Prof. Paul Emery (EULAR President) highlighted the “political relevance of the Council Conclusions”, as the Council's position “represents a clear message in favour of concrete initiatives at both EU and national levels, to address chronic diseases. This is particularly important for those disorders which represent a huge burden on our economies and health systems, such as musculoskeletal diseases.” According to Prof. Emery, it is now time to look into innovative approaches at Member States' level. National action plans targeting musculoskeletal conditions could be an excellent way of making progress.

The Council invites Member States to “further develop patient-centred policies for health promotion, primary prevention and secondary prevention, treatment and care of chronic diseases”. Neil Betteridge, EULAR Vice President PARE (People with Arthritis and Rheumatism in Europe), welcomed this recommendation: “EULAR long ago adopted the call of its patient group members of ‘Nothing about us without us’, meaning that the sort of collaboration between clinicians and patient representatives recommended in the Council Conclusions is already recognised as a key component of managing rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases optimally. EULAR can be proud that its own best practice in this respect, as well as in the scientific and research fields, has been identified by ministers across Europe as an essential part of the new framework for managing chronic conditions generally”.

The Council Conclusions on “Innovative approaches for chronic diseases in public health and healthcare systems” invite both Member States and the European Commission to discuss and propose actions in the following areas: health promotion and prevention, healthcare management,
research into chronic diseases as well as production and exchange of comparable information on chronic diseases across Europe. The European Commission is encouraged to support Member States as well as to prioritise chronic diseases in current and future Europe research and action programmes.

Prof. Emery welcomed the Council’s call to integrate chronic diseases as a priority in European programmes: “It is important that EU policy-making sees the longer term needs. The Council’s position is in line with EULAR’s approach. With a view to the EU 2020 goals, we need to invest strategically in an area like musculoskeletal diseases, where much can be gained in return, in terms of quality of life, but also in terms of economic benefit.”

In adopting these Conclusions, the Council of the EU recognises the burden of chronic diseases on people’s lives as well as on the overall society. It also asks for concrete actions from both Member States and EU institutions to address these issues. Member States and the European Commission are called upon to initiate a reflexion process in close dialogue with relevant stakeholders including patients, professionals, healthcare payers and providers, with the aim to optimise responses to the chronic diseases challenge. The Council Conclusions are an outcome of the work done by the Belgian EU Presidency during its six-month term.

About musculoskeletal diseases:

Chronic rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases affect almost one-quarter of all Europeans (more than 120 million). These people have impaired quality of life, various degrees of disability and often premature death. Rheumatic diseases elicit the highest costs to health care and social systems. In Europe alone, due to health care costs, work-disability, sick leave and premature retirement, rheumatic diseases impose an economic burden of more than € 240 billion per year on state budgets. The impact of these diseases is expected to grow immensely due to demographic and lifestyle changes.

About EULAR:

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation in the area of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. EULAR 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 treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal diseases. More information at www.eular.org.

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