

Study Group for risk factors for rheumatoid arthritis, under the auspices of the EULAR Standing Committee of Investigative Research (ESCIR)

Dr. Diane van der Woude and Prof. Andrew Cope

The preclinical and earliest clinically apparent phases of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) are likely to represent important therapeutic windows within which clinical outcomes can be dramatically modulated. The Study Group for risk factors for RA aims to build an **international network of excellence** to facilitate **collaborations** and **exchange knowledge** about these phases of RA within Europe.

The Study Group will provide a platform through which investigators can:

- Study **mechanisms** involved in specific stages of the disease progression.
- Identify and assess **biomarkers**, including molecular, cellular and imaging biomarkers, relevant to disease progression.
- Develop **natural history studies** that operate across **currently available cohorts**.
- Develop mechanisms to establish **new cohorts** to address specific aims as defined by the SGPCRA.
- Develop and assess **novel intervention strategies** and **therapeutic agents** within these phases of disease.

To achieve this goal, the Study Group will bring together expertise from all leading research institutes in relevant fields within Europe.

Founding members of the group were:

van Baarsen LG, Brouwer E, Buckley CD, Burmester GR, Gabay C, Catrina AI, Cope AP, Cornelis F, Emery P, Finckh A, Gay S, Hazes JM, van der Helm-van Mil A, Huizinga TW, Klareskog L, Kvien TK, Machold KP, Rantapää-Dahlqvist S, Ronnelid J, Schaardenburg D, Schett G, Smolen JS, Thomas S, Worthington J, Tak PP.

The Study Group will be open for all institutes and the membership will expand over time. Meetings will be connected to the EWRR and EULAR.

The specific aims of the Study Group are to:

- Define terminologies relevant to early phases of RA and to facilitate the development of shared standard operating procedures to allow groups working in these areas to interact in a cooperative manner.
- Facilitate research to address:
 1. Mechanisms driving the immunological abnormalities seen during the preclinical phase of RA and the stimuli which turn such abnormalities into a joint-centric disease.
 2. Processes in non-articular tissues (e.g. bone marrow and lymph node) and systems (e.g. neuroendocrine) which may be relevant to disease development and progression.
 3. Mechanisms operating within the joint during the transition from systemic immune disturbance to joint pathology.

- Facilitate the development of intervention protocols based upon an understanding of disease mechanisms operating during relevant phases of disease.
- Work with other ESCIR study groups including the animal model study group and the synovitis study group to develop innovative strategies to address clinically relevant question in preclinical and early RA.
- Activate new academic collaborations within Europe. In particular the group will look to ways to facilitate collaboration in natural history and therapeutic studies within an environment with varied regulatory requirements across participating countries.
- Activate the involvement of relevant Patient / User groups in the area of the earliest phases of RA.
- Work with print and other media to raise awareness of the earliest phases of RA, and of RA risk and the importance and benefit of early intervention amongst the general population and relevant political groupings.

Study group publications:

1. Raza K, Saber TP, Kvien TK, Tak PP, Gerlag DM. Timing the therapeutic window of opportunity in early rheumatoid arthritis - proposal for definitions of disease duration in clinical trials. *Ann Rheum Dis*. 2012 Aug 31. [Epub ahead of print]
2. Gerlag DM, Raza K, van Baarsen LG, Brouwer E, Buckley CD, Burmester GR, Gabay C, Catrina AI, Cope AP, Cornelis F, Dahlqvist SR, Emery P, Eyre S, Finckh A, Gay S, Hazes JM, van der Helm-van Mil A, Huizinga TW, Klareskog L, Kvien TK, Lewis C, Machold KP, Ronnelid J, Schaardenburg D, Schett G, Smolen JS, Thomas S, Worthington J, Tak PP. EULAR recommendations for terminology and research in individuals at risk of rheumatoid arthritis: report from the Study Group for Risk Factors for Rheumatoid Arthritis. *Ann Rheum Dis* 2012;71 :638-641.