



On World Arthritis Day '*Don't Delay, Connect Today*' Campaign educates on the importance of early diagnosis of rheumatic diseases

In Europe 120 million people live with rheumatic or musculoskeletal diseases.¹

12th October, 2018, Kilchberg, Switzerland – The European League Against Rheumatism, EULAR, calls for people to come together on World Arthritis Day (12th October) to raise awareness of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). EULAR's *Don't Delay, Connect Today* Campaign aims to improve early diagnosis and timely access to care to help benefit the lives of the 120 million people in Europe with RMDs.¹

Rheumatic diseases are one of the main causes of physical disability, contributing to societal and economic costs including loss of productivity in the workplace.² In the European Union alone, an extra one million people could be at work each day if early interventions were more widely accessible for people with RMDs.³ Rheumatic diseases not only affect the people suffering from them, but also their families who bear a significant burden in terms of emotional and social costs to ensure relatives receive the necessary care and treatment.^{4,5,6}

"Today, on World Arthritis Day, we call for better awareness and early referral for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases," comments EULAR President, Johannes W. Bijlsma, Professor of Rheumatology. "Early diagnosis, referral to a rheumatologist, and access to the latest and most effective treatment can lead to better results for these people, and that is the basis of our *Don't Delay, Connect Today* Campaign."

The EULAR Campaign *Don't Delay, Connect Today* aims to raise awareness of the importance of early diagnosis in preventing further damage to those living with RMDs, and to encourage timely access to evidence-based treatment. On World Arthritis Day, a global awareness-raising initiative, the *Don't Delay, Connect Today* campaign calls the RMD community to come together to improve understanding of life with RMDs. The Campaign encompasses all three pillars of EULAR: People with Arthritis and Rheumatism in Europe (PARE), Health Professionals in Rheumatology (HPR), and scientific societies.

The campaign highlights the fact that delayed diagnosis can affect a patient's physical ability and severely impact their quality of life.⁷ Through increasing awareness the campaign aims to tackle the challenge that RMDs present by improving diagnosis and access to effective treatments. In serious cases, RMDs can result in significant disability, impacting not only quality of life but also life expectancy.⁷ Fatigue, a major factor causing difficulty at work, is present in 90% of people with rheumatic disease.² There are more than 200 different RMDs, and these can start at any age in both children and adults.⁸

Early diagnosis and treatment in RMDs is important because it has been shown to help reduce pain and to slow and even prevent disease progression.^{9,10,11} Despite this RMDs often receive delayed or no diagnosis and improving awareness amongst healthcare professionals and the wider community is an important part of overcoming the challenge presented by RMDs.¹²

"General Practitioners receive quite a small amount of training for RMDs, let alone in those conditions in children, and I think it is really important for them to listen to young people and



their parents, as they are dealing with the symptoms every day,” explains Simon Stones, a member of PARE. “If we get a diagnosis quickly, that child could have such a different life.”

On World Arthritis Day Professor Johannes Bijlsma encourages people to educate themselves about RMDs and the affect they have on society and people’s lives.

Simon Stones has lived with arthritis for over 20 years following a diagnosis of juvenile idiopathic arthritis at three years old. To hear his story along with Aran Chaun’s, 11 years old, and Kate Betteridge’s who has lived with Rheumatoid Arthritis for 32 years, please watch the WAD 2017 video here: https://www.eular.org/eular_campaign.cfm

Could you or someone you know be one of the 120 million EU citizens with a rheumatic or musculoskeletal disease? For more information on how the *Don’t Delay, Connect Today* Campaign is fighting to raise awareness and change lives of those with RMDs please watch the WAD 2018 video here from 12 October: https://www.eular.org/eular_campaign.cfm

For more information on RMDs, the *Don’t Delay Connect Today* Campaign, and World Arthritis Day please visit: https://www.eular.org/eular_campaign.cfm

Take part in World Arthritis Day over social media by visiting Facebook @WorldArthritisDay, Twitter @ArthritisDay and Instagram: worldarthritisday.

NOTES TO EDITORS

To interview a patient case study or EULAR representative, please email Jessica Lowrie, Ruder Finn, at jlowrie@ruderfinn.co.uk or call **+44 (0) 20 7438 3097**.

About Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases

Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) are a diverse group of diseases that commonly affect the joints but can affect any organ of the body. There are more than 200 different RMDs, affecting both children and adults.⁸ 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.

About ‘Don’t Delay, Connect Today!’

‘Don’t Delay, Connect Today!’ is a EULAR initiative that unites the voices of its three pillars, patient (PARE) organisations, scientific member societies and health professional associations – as well as its international network – with the goal of highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and access to treatment. In the European Union alone, over 120 million people are currently living with a rheumatic disease (RMD), with many cases undetected. The ‘Don’t Delay, Connect Today!’ campaign aims to highlight that early diagnosis of RMDs and access to treatment can prevent further damage, and also reduce the burden on individual life and society as a whole.

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.

To find out more about the activities of EULAR, visit: www.eular.org.

References

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