

EULAR  
03.06.22  
1.06PM CEST  
Kilchberg,  
Switzerland

## ANTIMALARIALS AND ELECTROCARDIOGRAPHIC ALTERATIONS: NEW DATA BRING CONFIDENCE

**Two groups report findings at the EULAR Congress**

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**Antimalarial drugs such as hydroxychloroquine are commonly used in the management of rheumatic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, these agents were tested for patients with acute respiratory infection, with several studies reporting a risk of prolongation of corrected QT interval (QTc). Two groups have now released new findings on the relationship between antimalarials and electrocardiographic alterations in people with rheumatic diseases.**

Previous findings on the link between hydroxychloroquine and risk of arrhythmia have been contradictory, with low-level evidence-based results. To address this, Md Rashedul Hoque and colleagues in Arthritis Research Canada and Simon Fraser University ran a large cohort study. The group identified 11,518 hydroxychloroquine initiators with newly diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), and assessed the risk of incident arrhythmia. The results were presented at the 2022 EULAR Congress in Copenhagen.

Over mean follow-up of 8 years, there were 1,610 and 1,646 incident arrhythmias in the initiator and non-initiator groups, respectively – giving crude incidence rates of 17.5 and 18.1 per 1,000 person-years. This suggests no increased risk of any type of arrhythmia among new users of hydroxychloroquine.

Dr Carmen Riesco Bárcena also presented findings on the possible relationship between antimalarial drugs and electrocardiographic alterations in people with SLE. In this cross-sectional study of 91 patients, 4.69% of those on current antimalarials had a prolonged QTc, compared to 3.7% of those without current treatment.

Further investigation showed a statistically significant association between taking antimalarial drugs and the elongated QTc interval. However, multivariate analysis suggested there was no significant relationship between electrocardiographic alterations and treatment with antimalarials.

Taken together, the findings presented at the EULAR Congress increase confidence that hydroxychloroquine can be used in the management of RA and SLE.

### Source

Rashedul Hoque M, et al. Risk of Arrhythmia among New Users of Hydroxychloroquine: A Longitudinal Population-based Cohort Study on Newly Diagnosed Rheumatoid Arthritis and Systemic Lupus Erythematosus Patients. Presented at EULAR 2022; abstract OP0039.

Riesco Bárcena C, et al. Antimalarial drugs and electrocardiographic alterations in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus. Presented at EULAR 2022; poster POS0191.

**About EULAR**

EULAR is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (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.

**About the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology**

Since its introduction in 2000, the annual EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology has become the primary platform for exchange of scientific and clinical information in Europe. It is also a renowned forum for interaction between medical doctors, scientists, people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry worldwide. The EULAR congress is usually held in June in one of the major cities in Europe.

The scientific programme covers a wide range of topics on clinical innovations, clinical, translational and basic science. Meetings set up by associations of people with arthritis/rheumatism, health professionals and the health care industry complement the programme. The poster sessions, offering lively interaction between presenters and participants, are regarded by many as the heart of the congress.

Over the years, the EULAR Congress has gained a reputation of being a most innovative platform for the practicing physician particularly with respect to the acquisition of information on novel clinical research. The congress attracts more than 18,000 delegates from more than 130 countries.

The aim of the EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology is to provide a forum of the highest standard for scientific, both clinical and basic, educational, and social exchange between professionals involved in rheumatology, liaising with patient organisations, in order to achieve progress in the clinical care of people with rheumatic diseases.

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