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Press Release

Don't Delay, Connect Today: The European Awareness Campaign on Rheumatic Diseases is Launched in Romania

- **With the Romanian slogan “Fără amânare! Fă o programare!”**, the campaign aims to increase awareness regarding the importance of receiving an early diagnosis and following the appropriate treatment in rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs).
- **More than 600,000 people in Romania (3% of the total population), out of which 2,000 are children, suffer from rheumatic inflammatory diseases.**
- **RMDs have a profound socio-economic impact, generating 50% of absenteeism in the workplace and about 60% of the permanent inability-to-work figures.**

Bucharest, April 19th, 2018 – Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases are the most frequent form of chronic diseases, affecting around 1,7 billion people worldwide, with a 45% increase in the last 20 years. Since RMDs can lead to disabilities and also force patients to retire ahead of time, EULAR (The European League Against Rheumatism) has launched the 'Don't Delay, Connect Today' awareness campaign, aiming to increase awareness regarding the importance of receiving an early diagnosis and following the appropriate treatment for people with RMDs.

More than 600,000 people in Romania (3% of the total population), out of which 2,000 are children, suffer from rheumatic inflammatory diseases. More than 200 conditions that are included in the RMDs category - among which rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, fibromyalgia, lupus and gout are included. This is why The Romanian League Against Rheumatism and The Romanian Society of Rheumatology have officially launched, under the aegis of EULAR, the “Fără amânare! Fă o programare!” campaign in Romania.

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The campaign is launched in Bucharest, with a conference on RMDs, that will be attended by high EULAR officials, authorities, health professionals and patients, debating subjects such as: The importance of early diagnosis, living with RMDs, helping patients keep their jobs in order to prevent socio-economic imbalances, and other topics of interest. Prof. Johannes W. J. Bijlsma, EULAR President, Dieter Wiek, EULAR Vice-President, representing PARE, Prof. Dr. Ruxandra Ionescu, The President of The Romanian Rheumatology Society and Conf. Dr. Cătălin Codreanu, The President of The Romanian League Against Rheumatism are several of the high profile participants.

Further on, as part of the campaign, a series of awareness events in two shopping centers in Bucharest (AFI Cotroceni – April, 19th and Mall Promenada – April 20th) will take place, where people will have the opportunity to find out more about RMDs by coming to the clock-shaped stand.

RMDs have a profound socio-economic impact, generating 50% of absenteeism in the workplace and about 60% of the permanent inability-to-work figures. Because the ability to work is highly affected, the unemployment rate is 3 times higher for people with RMDs than that of the general population, representing the main cause of mobility reduction and the second cause of professional activity limitations, after cardio-vascular disease.

“RMDs have a major social and economic impact on our society. 42% of the Romanian workers say they experience back pain because of their workplace, a percentage that is one of the highest within the European countries. To prevent functional deficits, RMDs must be recognised and correctly treated from the first signs. Early treatment has a major role in reducing direct, indirect and intangible costs of RMDs and in maintaining a healthy workforce.”, said Conf. Dr. Cătălin Codreanu, The President of The Romanian League Against Rheumatism.

RMDs represent a health and socio-economic problem throughout all of Europe, affecting more than 120 million people. They are the cause of the highest costs for national health and socio-economic systems: 240 billion euros, the equivalent of 2% of the EU’s GDP and a quarter of the total amount spent on health. The days when people miss work as a result of an RMD mean a total loss of 650 million euros per year.

“The need for the Campaign anno 2018 is very high, since we are now indeed able to make a (very) early diagnosis of many of the RMDs, and since we are now able to treat these early patients very well, before functional disabilities occur. A real gain in secondary prevention that benefits not only the involved patients, but society as a whole.”, said Professor Johannes W. J. Bijlsma, EULAR President, who is participating in the event.

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Rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis are among the most frequent rheumatic inflammatory diseases in Romania. About 1% of the general population (200,000 people) suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, that usually debuts around the age of 40-50 years and affects three times more women than men. Inflammatory back pain, most often caused by rheumatic inflammatory disease such as ankylosing spondylitis, affects around 1% of the adult population (mostly men) and often starts before the age of 30.

Although the general perception is that RMDs only affect old people, as their prevalence increases with age, they also have a big impact on the active population and even children; Romania having around 2,000 children with juvenile arthritis.

“Early diagnosis is extremely important, as the treatment for RMDs is a race against the clock. Modern treatments are able to induce remission, as long as the rheumatologist’s intervention takes place before the appearance of structural lesions. In most cases however, the rheumatologist usually first sees the patient after he already has disabilities as a result of RMDs, making remission impossible, as the evolution of destructive lesions leads to an irreversible functional deficit.” said Prof. Dr. Ruxandra Ionescu, The President of The Romanian Rheumatology Society.

Early diagnosis is key to preventing further damage, but RMDs often receive delayed or no diagnosis. If not treated appropriately, daily activities are affected, reducing quality of life and impacting on physical abilities. Persistent joint and muscle pain, extreme fatigue, stiffness and depression are all symptoms of RMDs. Among the factors that increase the risk of RMDs are smoking, excess weight, genetic factors, jobs that put pressure on the joints, infections and age.

For more information about the “Fără amânare! Fă o programare!” campaign and RMDs, please visit www.reumatism.ro and the Facebook page www.facebook.com/FaraAmanare

For more information on the campaign, ‘Don’t Delay, Connect Today’, go to the EULAR website (www.eular.org) and follow the campaign on social media #ConnectToday.

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