

## EULAR in brief

### **Who we are**

The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the organization which represents the patient organizations, the health professional and the scientific societies of all the European nations in the area of rheumatic diseases.

### **Rheumatic diseases**

Rheumatic diseases comprise all painful conditions of the musculoskeletal system and especially affect joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Common symptoms are pain, swelling, and stiffness. Some rheumatic diseases can also involve internal organs. There are more than 200 different rheumatic disease entities.

Among all disease groups, rheumatic diseases affect the largest number of individuals in the industrialized world with up to one third of people of all ages being involved at some point during their life time. The diseases span from various types of degenerative joint and soft tissue diseases to osteoporosis and from arthritis to systemic connective tissue diseases. They are frequently afflicted with impaired quality of life, reduction of physical function, disability and premature death. Thus, rheumatic conditions have repeatedly been demonstrated to be the single disease group that elicits the highest costs to our health care and socioeconomic structures by virtue of direct expenses for medicines, surgery, physiotherapy and hospitalizations as well as costs for sick leave, disability pensions, rehabilitative measures and expenses for the individual families for caretaking of people with rheumatic diseases.

### **Our mission**

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.

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 musculoskeletal diseases by the governing bodies in Europe.

### **Our members**

EULAR is set up of four types of institutional members: scientific societies, social leagues (i.e. patient organizations), health professionals associations and corporate members. With currently 44 scientific member societies, 31 national social leagues and 4 allied health professionals associations, EULAR underscores the importance of combating rheumatic diseases not only by medical means, but also through a wider context of care for rheumatic patients and a thorough understanding of their social and other needs. Further, 31 corporate members adhere to the code of practice between EULAR and the pharmaceutical industry.

### **How to become a member**

National organizations (scientific societies, social leagues or allied health professional organizations) in Europe - not individuals - can apply for membership in EULAR. Membership applications will be ratified by the EULAR General Assembly. According to the EULAR by-laws, only one organization of a type from any one country can be accepted as member.

## How we work

To manage and promote its goals effectively, EULAR has set up an organizational structure specific to its needs:

The **Executive Committee**, composed of 20 members, is the managing body of EULAR and deals with scientific, educational, administrative, financial and organizational matters of EULAR. Members serve between 2 and 4 years and are elected (officers) or ratified (Standing Committee Chairpersons) by the delegates at the EULAR General Assembly.

The **General Assembly** is the highest authority of EULAR. It is composed of the members of the Executive Committee and the delegates of the member organizations and corporate members. The General Assembly meets once a year on the occasion of the EULAR Annual European Congress.

Eight **Standing Committees** manage and operate a major part of the activities of EULAR like developing recommendations and criteria, performing or coordinating research activities, designing and running educational programmes, or organizing focused scientific or patient-oriented meetings. Thus, EULAR's Standing Committees provide a forum for specialists from Europe and overseas to meet and work together on specific projects. In some areas of common interest, collaborative projects with other organizations, such as the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), have recently been started, which will ultimately lead to a more widespread distribution and acceptance of the results. The chairpersons of the Standing Committees are ex-officio members of the Executive Committee.

The **Congress Programme Committee** is responsible for establishing a state-of-the-art scientific programme as well as attractive programmes for health professionals and patients attending the Annual European Congress.

## What we do

EULAR is a truly pan-European organization fostering a multitude of activities in areas of research, patient care, and education.

EULAR supports **research projects** in rheumatology by funding collaborative research between European rheumatology groups in fields that are in line with the mission, goals and strategies of EULAR. To this end, EULAR provides a number of scientific grants every year. Additionally, the EULAR Standing Committees work on and regularly publish recommendations for the diagnosis and treatment of various rheumatic disorders. Each of these recommendations or set of criteria are developed by a group of experts in their field and are published in the EULAR journal, the Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases.

**Education and training** in rheumatology is another key activity area of EULAR. Every year, EULAR sponsors a number of educational grants and bursaries for scientific researchers and clinicians, health professionals and patients who have an educational need. With these financial "awards", EULAR is committed to helping individuals develop their skills and expertise as well as broaden their network of contacts on an international level.

EULAR offers an extensive programme of educational workshops and courses for trainee and specialized rheumatologists. With the two-yearly Postgraduate Course, for instance, EULAR seeks to harmonize and update the professional knowledge of European rheumatologists whilst giving the participants the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas and experiences. EULAR also recently launched a comprehensive on-line course on rheumatic diseases on the Internet, giving trainees from all over the world the opportunity to acquire a strong base of expertise in rheumatic diseases and the latest insights into assessment and treatment.

## **EULAR Congresses**

Since its introduction in 2000, the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology has become the primary platform for exchange of scientific and clinical information in Europe as well as a renowned forum for interaction between medical doctors, scientists, patients, 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. Since 2000, Nice, Prague, Stockholm, Lisbon, Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam, and Barcelona have offered memorable venues for the congress. Paris, Copenhagen, and Rome will follow for 2008 to 2010.

The scientific programme at the congress covers a wide range of topics on clinical innovations, clinical, translational and basic science. In addition, there are meetings organized by people with arthritis, by health professionals and by the health care industry. The poster sessions, offering lively interaction between presenters and participants, are considered 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.

Since 2000, the congress has seen a steady increase in the number of participants, with an all-time high of more than 12,300 registered delegates from 111 different countries at EULAR 2007 in Barcelona.

## **EULAR Journal**

First published in 1939, the Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases (ARD) have been the official scientific publication of EULAR since 2000. Each month, the Annals feature original work on all aspects of rheumatology. Topic oriented editorials and reviews are commissioned to address the wider aspects of rheumatology. The Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases has currently (2007) an impact factor of 5.767. ARD Online supplements the printed edition and offers subscribers access to more than 60 years of archive content.

## **EULAR – a partner in Europe and beyond**

While the heartland of EULAR's activities remains Europe, EULAR has extended its interests, collaboration and programmes far beyond. EULAR shares many goals and efforts with the American College of Rheumatology, ILAR, and the Regional Leagues of Asia-Pacific, Central and South America, and Africa.

With the formation of the Alliance Against Arthritis (AAA) in Europe, EULAR has entered a new strategy in respect to its relation with the EU in Brussels and Strasbourg, aimed at offering partnership to the European bodies as an organization that represents both patients, clinically active health professionals and scientists in Europe. As a major achievement from these efforts, both the European Parliament and the European

Commission explicitly introduced "rheumatic diseases" as a priority for European funding within the European Union's 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7).

In order to promote EULAR and European rheumatology and to improve the management of musculoskeletal conditions, EULAR supports a variety of international initiatives and activities with international organizations such as the WHO International and Regional Office for Europe, the European Community, the Bone and Joint Decade, the European Federation of National Associations of Orthopaedics and Traumatology (EFORT), and the International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF).

## **EULAR offices**

EULAR has a permanent Executive Secretariat at Kilchberg near Zurich, Switzerland. The secretariat fulfils many functions like serving EULAR's member organizations and its Executive Committee, running and overseeing the growing educational programme and activities of the Standing Committees, and organizing the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology together with an external agency.

In 2007, EULAR opened a representation office in Brussels, located at the premises of the European Affairs Consulting Group (EACON). The EULAR representation in Brussels helps facilitate interactions between EULAR and the European Union in view of promoting rheumatology in Europe in both the political and public arena as well as managing initiatives and activities related to improving musculoskeletal conditions of all patients in Europe.

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