



## Health Policy Still Ignores Rheumatic Diseases

- **Rheumatic disorders are the most common causes of severe long-term pain**
- **Rheumatic diseases in the younger generation are widely under-estimated**
- **More attention must be paid to prevention and the treatment of younger patients**

Policy makers from several EU Member States gathering at the 9<sup>th</sup> European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) strongly supported claims for more attention to be devoted to rheumatic diseases. Participants of a workshop organised at the Health Forum criticised traditional ways of thinking which focus only on mortality as criterion for a disease's seriousness. Speakers instead asked for criteria like economic cost and social burden to be taken more into account when defining policy priorities.

At the workshop (organised by the *European League against Rheumatism EULAR*), health professionals, patients and researchers shed light on the medical, social and economic consequences of rheumatic diseases and concluded that the place of rheumatic diseases in national and European health policy does not correspond to the enormous overall impact of rheumatic diseases. Over 100 million Europeans, including many young people, are affected by some form of rheumatic disease in their lives. Over the next years, ageing European population and changing lifestyles are expected to boost dramatically the number of the people affected.

Rheumatic disorders are the most common causes of severe long-term pain, sick leave and physical disability. They have a major impact on quality of life of the patients and their relatives. Direct and indirect costs related to musculoskeletal diseases in Europe are estimated at more than two percent of GNP each year. *“Despite existing figures on prevalence and estimated disease burden, rheumatic diseases have often not been among the health priorities at national and European level – because they usually do not have fatal consequences for the patients”*, said Tore K Kvien, Professor of Rheumatology at the University of Oslo and President of *EULAR*.

Enhanced research efforts are needed to improve knowledge about the causes of most of the diseases, to find cures and develop better treatments. *“Improving pan-European collaborative research is one of the main challenges for rheumatology research”*, Josef Smolen, Professor of Internal Medicine and Chairman of the Department of Rheumatology of Vienna General Hospital pointed out. *“The major burden of rheumatic diseases should be mirrored in higher European Union support for pan-European collaboration in this field.”*

*“There is a lot of work to be done to correct existing myths about rheumatic diseases. The majority of the population still thinks that rheumatic diseases only affect the elderly”*, said Sandra Canadelo, Chair of the *EULAR* Social Leagues who developed arthritis at the age of 24. *“This misperception is reflected in the field of paediatric rheumatology which faces significant problems in ensuring the financial support for clinical and laboratory studies, best treatment and disease management.”*

More information:

Useful Links.

Eular: [www.eular.org](http://www.eular.org)

EHFG: [www.ehfg.org](http://www.ehfg.org)

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**Further press information on the EHFG and pictures can also be found at [www.ehfg.org](http://www.ehfg.org)**