



Fact Sheet: Impact of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Introduction

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic disease affecting more than 20 million people worldwide¹. It is one of the most common forms of autoimmune disease, affecting twice as many women as men². Symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis include swelling, pain and limitation to movement in joints, and commonly occur in the hands, feet, elbows, knees and neck. As the disease progresses many people suffer from irreversible joint damage, which ultimately results in deformity and disability. More severe cases of rheumatoid arthritis may involve the eyes, lungs or blood vessels.

Prevalence of rheumatoid arthritis

- Approximately three million people with rheumatoid arthritis live in Europe³
- The progressive nature of rheumatoid arthritis and its onset in middle age means that patients often live for 30 years or more with the disease³
- The prevalence of rheumatoid arthritis rises to an estimated 2% in people over the age of 60.³ This creates a significant burden on society as the percentage of people age 60+ continues to increase worldwide.

Human impact of rheumatoid arthritis

- People with rheumatoid arthritis begin to suffer progressive, permanent joint damage early on in their disease, long before the onset of visible changes, such as joint deformity and disability. Within the first two years, up to 70% of people with rheumatoid arthritis have radiographic evidence of joint damage⁸
- The average life expectancy of a person with rheumatoid arthritis is shortened by three to seven years and patients with severe rheumatoid arthritis may die 10-15 years earlier than expected⁴
- In a study involving 109 people with rheumatoid arthritis and 27 carers⁵, pain was found to be the 'daily currency' of life with rheumatoid arthritis. Other symptoms — including fatigue, depression and loss of appetite — were perceived to be related to this pain
- In the same study, people with rheumatoid arthritis compared it to being 'eaten alive'
- Another study involving 500 people with rheumatoid arthritis⁶ found that:
 - People with rheumatoid arthritis felt a loss of control over planning for the future and apprehension about being unable to care for their family
 - People with rheumatoid arthritis experience symptoms on a daily basis that can restrict their physical activity
 - Two-thirds of people in the study rated their quality of life as moderate or poor

Economic impact of rheumatoid arthritis

- The combined total annual economic cost of rheumatoid arthritis is estimated at €45.4 billion across Europe³
- The largest cost of rheumatoid arthritis comes from lost productivity, as many patients have to leave the workforce as early as three years after disease onset³
- Within ten years of the start of their condition, half of those with rheumatoid arthritis are unable to hold down a full-time job⁷
- There are considerable costs associated with rheumatoid arthritis, such as informal care, non-medical costs and lost production, which increase with disease progression. Therefore, early diagnosis and effective treatment leads to considerable savings and improvements in patients' quality of life.

References

¹ Arthritis Support - based on U.S. Census Bureau data, World Health Organization statistics and epidemiology studies (<http://www.arthritisupport.com/library/showarticle.cfm/ID/879/T/Arthritis/cat/traditional/> last accessed 3rd June

² WHO report: The global burden of rheumatoid arthritis in the year 2000 (http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/bod_rheumatoidarthritis.pdf)

³ 2007 report on 'The Burden of Rheumatoid Arthritis and Patient Access to Treatments'

⁴ MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopaedia (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000431.htm>)

⁵ Rheumatoid Arthritis: A Patient insight study. Lifescience Dynamics – qualitative insight study; March 2006

⁶ Survey of Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients. A report for the Arthritis Foundation.

⁷ Brooks PM. MJA Practice Essentials — Rheumatology. Sydney: Australasian Medical Publishing Company Ltd., 2007

⁸ O'Dell JR. *N Engl J Med* 2004; 350: 2591-2602