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Call for new standards of care in arthritis/rheumatism

Access to the psychological support and self-management courses could ease the emotional burden of arthritis/rheumatism, survey says

12 October 2008 – An online survey for World Arthritis Day (WAD), completed by over 3,600* respondents revealed that access to psychological support and self-management courses could help people with arthritis/rheumatism cope more effectively with their condition and achieve better quality of life. Healthcare professionals, people with rheumatic disease and their carers, who responded to the survey, highlight the importance of integrating psychological support into the standard treatment regime.

The survey, a project run by the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) Standing Committee of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (PARE), was completed by people with arthritis/rheumatism, their carers and health professionals from over 50 countries across the world.

Ninety seven percent of people with rheumatism/arthritis and carers indicated that this condition affects them/people they care for emotionally and 5% of them said it may lead to depression. Despite of the scale of the problem only 35% of the survey respondents said they raise the emotional impact of their arthritis/rheumatism with their doctor.

Clinical data demonstrates that the quality of life of these people can be enhanced by introducing special coping strategies¹. The majority of people with arthritis/rheumatism who responded to the survey saw the need for professional support: 85% emphasised that psychological support (psychotherapy, sessions with psychologists, treatments) should be included in the overall care and over a half of them would like to have access to self-management courses.

Similarly, health professionals are increasingly aware of the psychological impact of arthritis/rheumatism: 71% said they bring this problem up during a consultation, 33% said

they refer their patients to the specialist treatment (e.g. psychotherapy) and 22% suggest a self-management course, if one exists in the given country.

"The main message coming out of the World Arthritis Day survey is the real need for a holistic approach in treating people with arthritis and rheumatism, ensuring the treatment paradigm covers all aspects of these conditions and not just the physical symptoms. This is clearly voiced by both patients and physicians and needs to be recognized and addressed within the structure of national healthcare systems" - said president of EULAR Executive Committee, Prof.

Ferdinand C. Breedveld.

"Our survey clearly demonstrates that both people with arthritis/rheumatism and healthcare professionals recognize the importance of addressing psychological aspects of this condition. Yet, in many countries support is not available or limited. – said Sandra Canadelo, Chairperson of the Standing Committee of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (EULAR) - This year, on World Arthritis Day, we hope that our call for better access to different forms of psychological support for people with arthritis/rheumatism will be heard by health policy makers on a national and international level."

The findings from the Think Positive survey correspond with the available clinical evidence. This evidence demonstrates that arthritis/rheumatism can have a debilitating effect on people's lives by restricting physical, psychological and social function. A half to two thirds of people with arthritis/rheumatism report lost social relationships, disrupted leisure activities and limitations in employment because of psychological problems². In many cases some types of arthritis/rheumatism can be associated with depression and anxiety³.

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Results from the Think Positive survey are reflected in the individual stories of people with arthritis/rheumatism who share personal experiences of coping with their conditions emotionally and finding the best way to keep a positive frame of mind. Their testimonials are available on WAD website <http://www.worldarthritisday.org>

- Notes to editors -

About the WAD survey

The World Arthritis Day survey is a project run by EULAR Standing Committee of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (PARE). Every year the survey looks at different aspects of

arthritis/rheumatism and generates useful statistics to support a call for better standards of treatment and care for people with arthritis/rheumatism. The "Think Positive" theme acknowledges the emotional impact of this condition and the need for better psychological support being offered to people with rheumatism/arthritis.

About self-management courses

Self-management courses are run by people with arthritis/rheumatism who have been especially trained to teach techniques which help people get greater control over their disease, increase their confidence and improve their quality of life. These sessions create forums during which people feel comfortable to share their experiences and learn from each other. They enhance dialog and relationship building with other people affected by arthritis/rheumatism.

About EULAR Standing Committee of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (PARE)

The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the organisation which represents the patient, health professional and scientific societies of rheumatology of all the European nations. EULAR endeavours to stimulate, promote, and support the research, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of rheumatic diseases.

The national organisations of people with arthritis/rheumatism across Europe work together via the EULAR Standing Committee of PARE. The EULAR Standing Committee of PARE brings together representatives of arthritis and other musculoskeletal user groups around Europe to work towards improving the quality of life for the more than 100 million people in Europe living with these conditions. The committee's vision is of people with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in Europe being empowered to lead full and independent lives.

More information is available on the website www.worldarthritisday.org and www.eular.org


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