Are my patients with rheumatic diseases at higher risk of COVID-19?

According to the last WHO situation report (10 March 2020), the novel Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been confirmed in 113 702 patients, most of them in China (71.1%) and the rest in other 109 countries, with a global case-fatality rate (CFR) of 3.5% (4012 deaths among 113 702 confirmed cases). Most patients have presented with fever, dry cough and fatigue, about 81% of cases reported in China have been classified as symptomatic.

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Based on the clinical information published to date from the new and previous outbreaks caused by coronaviruses (severe acute respiratory syndrome and Middle East respiratory syndrome), there is no overwhelming evidence that patients with rheumatic diseases are at an increased risk compared with other comorbidities. Although further information regarding this outbreak need to surface before any solid conclusion can be made. We believe that based on the knowledge of other viral infections and the effect of the therapies used in rheumatic patients leads us to think that there is an increased probability for this population to acquire COVID-19. In counterpart, there is also some evidence of the potential benefit of a drug widely used in rheumatic diseases: chloroquine. Only time and the directed clinical trials will clarify the prophylactic or therapeutic role of chloroquine and its effect on the risk of COVID-19 in rheumatic patients.