An extraordinary 75 years of EULAR

The European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR) has reached yet another remarkable milestone, not only in the contribution to medical advances in rheumatology, but also in the development, maintenance and adherence of a scientific alliance for the last 75 years, dedicated to improving the lives of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs).

In today’s global climate, achievements such as these are ever more significant, wherefore EULAR’s President, Professor Annamaria Iagnocco, is proud to applaud this milestone and comments on EULAR’s prevalence and perseverance:

EULAR has made great strides in the last 75 years, and I am particularly proud of the outstanding achievements we have accomplished over the past years, despite the volatile global climate. From detriments to public health from the pandemic to war and tragedy in politics – the EULAR family has persevered and displayed their dedication through fostering excellence in research, education, and many more activities in rheumatology. We have stood together, in alliance, over many generations, and I could not be prouder to welcome this anniversary in Copenhagen this year, the city where we held our first Congress.

Since its foundation in 1947 in Copenhagen, EULAR has participated in a variety of advances and noteworthy medical developments in the field of rheumatology. Starting in the late 1940s, progress in the field began with the development of anti-inflammatory, immune-modulating and disease-modifying drugs. This medical leap transpired with the introduction of glucocorticoids. Moving into the 1960s, the first-ever application of methotrexate, a disease-modifying drug for persons living with rheumatoid arthritis, revolutionised the treatment and management of chronic inflammatory diseases. Even today, glucocorticoids and methotrexate are still considered pillars for treatment of inflammatory diseases. Another turning point for persons living with RMDs was the ‘invention’ of monoclonal antibodies in 1975. This development led to the remarkable breakthrough of specifically designed drugs (target drugs), such as the tumour necrosis factor (TNF)-alpha inhibitors, which then became available for treatment of many persons living with RMDs during the late 1990s and 2000s, and more recently of other treatments targeting molecules and cytokines involved in the inflammatory process, which ultimately leads to joint destruction and disability. Other contributions followed, such as the recognition that early diagnosis and treatment that is targeted on remission leads to substantially better outcomes, allowing for a broad range of targeted therapies. Additionally, consistent innovation in medical technology contributed to advances in imaging and specific biomarkers for the early diagnosis and follow-up of diseases, which have recently become available in the field of RMDs.

Despite several RMDs being incurable, advances in pharmacological and other therapies in rheumatology have led to an array of cutting-edge treatments available to those affected today. If properly managed, many people living with RMDs may lead a normal life, maintain their work-life balance and look forward to a typical life expectancy. In addition to the advances in medicine and strategic management of RMDs, surgical, physical and other occupational therapies have also significantly reduced the impact of RMDs on the individual and society. An example would be total joint replacement, which has become a very pertinent option for people with severe osteoarthritis of the hip or the knee. New, minimally invasive surgical strategies enrich the therapeutic spectrum and mesenchymal stem cell transplantation may in the future pertain reparative therapies.

In September 1947, the first EULAR European Congress of Rheumatology was held in Copenhagen, with 200 delegates from 16 countries. This year, EULAR will return to Copenhagen to mark their extraordinary 75th anniversary and expect delegates from more than 130 countries. In alliance with scientific societies, national organisations of people with arthritis/rheumatism and health professional associations of all the European nations, EULAR has consistently displayed their devotion to rheumatology and thus has offered a chance for those affected by RMDs to lead a normal life or, in the very least, a better quality of life. EULAR underscores the importance of combating RMDs not only by medical means, but also through a wider context of care for persons living with RMDs and a thorough understanding of their social and other needs. The EULAR Congress has become the flag of the organisation and a forum for innovation in rheumatology. EULAR President, Professor Annamaria Iagnocco, concludes:

Copenhagen, as EULAR’s place of birth, is an exceptionally significant city for us, and we look forward to going back to a country that acknowledges our organisation and supports its strategies, aiming to reduce the impact of RMDs on those afflicted and to improve their social position and quality of life. 2022 will be an extraordinary year for EULAR, marking not only our 75th anniversary but also our first-ever hybrid congress! We cordially invite you to attend our Congress and support EULAR in our mission to improve the lives of people with RMDs.