

Response to: 'Correspondence on 'Factors associated with COVID-19-related death in people with rheumatic diseases: results from the COVID-19 Global Rheumatology Alliance physician reported registry' by Arnaud and Devilliers

We thank Arnaud and Devilliers¹ for their correspondence on our article.² They raise the important topic of risk prediction models for estimating the risk of COVID-19-related death, and the potential development of a risk prediction tool using data from our article.

We agree with the authors that patients using immunosuppressive/immunomodulatory agents have different risks, depending on factors such as their age, chronic conditions and specific drug therapies. However, we also recognise that there are significant limitations in using the estimates published in our manuscript to develop a COVID-19-related death risk prediction model to guide vaccination strategies. These limitations include:

1. While robust models that predict the prognosis of COVID-19 are desirable to support decisions about shielding, hospital admission, treatment and population level interventions such as COVID-19 vaccination, this was not the primary aim of the published study. Importantly, it should be noted that owing to the voluntary nature of the registry there is an inherent selection bias, with an over-representation of severe cases, as discussed in our manuscript. Any model developed in a specific dataset will only reflect the risk for a particular patient under similar circumstances and receiving similar care. Therefore, in the same way that the hospitalisation and death rates reported in our article cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of patients with rheumatic diseases, a risk model developed using the reported data may lack generalisability.³
2. Given the rapid and dynamic evolution of COVID-19, static risk prediction models are likely to rapidly become obsolete. COVID-19 warrants the need to develop 'living' risk prediction models which can be updated regularly as our understanding of COVID-19 increases and more data becomes available. For example, the performance and generalisability of any risk prediction model will depend heavily on contextual and environmental time-dependent factors, such as the underlying burden of infection and immunity levels in the population of interest. Temporal trends can be dictated by improved testing capacity, vaccination efforts and increased ability to better treat patients with COVID-19 (eg, pharmacological treatment with glucocorticoids and remdesivir, changes in invasive/non-invasive ventilation strategies, prone positioning and prophylaxis/prevention of complications such as thromboembolic events). They can also arise from typically unmeasured time-dependent factors such as adherence to shielding and other infection control measures (that can affect the likelihood of exposure to SARS-CoV-2) and healthcare resource availability, which has not only varied significantly over time, but also between and within countries and regions at the same point in time.⁴
3. A systematic review of published risk prediction models for COVID-19 found that most models are subject to a high risk of bias with optimistic reported performance, raising concern that these models may be unreliable when applied in

practice.⁵ Indeed, development of risk prediction models should follow a robust and standardised approach, as outlined in the Transparent Reporting of a multivariable prediction model for Individual Prognosis Or Diagnosis statement.⁶ This recommended standardised approach includes aspects such as assessment of model performance, calibration and internal/external validation. All these steps are essential to be undertaken before a risk prediction model can be used to support population risk stratification in relation to public health interventions such as vaccine utilisation.

All these elements being clarified, and for reasons of data transparency, we provide here the estimate of the intercept of the model ($\beta_0 = -4.059$).

We appreciate the comment from Arnaud and Devilliers,¹ and agree that risk prediction models have the potential to help patients and doctors reach a shared understanding of risk, and help stratify risk in populations for public health purposes. However, developing a risk prediction model for risk of COVID-19-related death in patients with rheumatic diseases should constitute a separate effort, undertaken with a larger sample size, and taking the above considerations into account.

Pedro M Machado ^{1,2,3} **Martin Schäfer**,⁴ **Anja Strangfeld** ⁴,
Laure Gossec ^{5,6} **Milena Gianfrancesco**,⁷ **Saskia Lawson-Tovey**,^{8,9}
Elsa F Mateus,^{10,11} **Loreto Carmona** ¹² **Kimme L Hyrich** ^{8,9},
Philip C Robinson ^{13,14} **Jinoos Yazdany**⁷

¹Centre for Rheumatology and Department of Neuromuscular Diseases, University College London, London, UK

²National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centre (BRC), University College London Hospitals (UCLH) NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

³Department of Rheumatology, Northwick Park Hospital, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust, London, UK

⁴Epidemiology and Health Care Research, German Rheumatism Research Center (DRFZ Berlin), Berlin, Germany

⁵Institut Pierre Louis d'Epidémiologie et de Santé Publique, INSERM, Sorbonne Université, Paris, France

⁶Department of Rheumatology, Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, AP-HP.Sorbonne Université, Paris, France

⁷Division of Rheumatology, Department of Medicine, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, California, USA

⁸Centre for Genetics and Genomics Versus Arthritis, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

⁹National Institute of Health Research Manchester Biomedical Research Centre, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester, UK

¹⁰Standing Committee of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (PARE), European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR), Kilchberg, Switzerland

¹¹Portuguese League Against Rheumatic Diseases (LPCDR), Lisbon, Portugal

¹²Instituto de Salud Musculoesquelética, Madrid, Spain

¹³Faculty of Medicine, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

¹⁴Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Metro North Hospital & Health Service, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Correspondence to Dr Pedro M Machado, Centre for Rheumatology and Department of Neuromuscular Diseases, University College London, London WC1E 6JF, UK; p.machado@ucl.ac.uk

Handling editor Josef S Smolen

Twitter Pedro M Machado @pedrommachado, Loreto Carmona @carmona_loreto and Philip C Robinson @philiprobison

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ORCID iDs

Pedro M Machado <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8411-7972>

Anja Strangfeld <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6233-022X>

Laure Gossec <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4528-310X>

Loreto Carmona <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4401-2551>

Kimme L Hyrich <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8242-9262>

Philip C Robinson <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3156-3418>

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