

EULAR encourages Europe to include expert view in shortages question

17 April 2020, Kilchberg, Switzerland – The European League Against Rheumatism, EULAR, welcomes and supports the efforts of the European Medicines Agency and the European Commission to address shortages of medicines, including hydroxychloroquine, on the European market. EULAR calls to incorporate independent medical expertise in these ongoing efforts.

Medicine shortages are a significant challenge for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) in the ongoing situation around COVID-19. Data collected by EULAR shows that a majority of countries in Europe have encountered and are still encountering serious shortages of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), and that shortages in essential medicines were also encountered before the COVID-19 pandemic. EULAR advises that the unrestricted access to HCQ for a possible COVID-19 prophylaxis in the absence of clinical trial data should be avoided.

The European Medicines Agency, EMA, and the European Commission have released guidelines on the question of medicine shortages during COVID-19. EULAR calls for the European rheumatology community to be closely involved in the development of guidelines and stands ready to provide input and support to the European Medicines Agency, EMA, and the European Commission.

Concerning this matter, the EULAR journal, *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, ARD, publishes an article of utmost relevance to this matter this week, 'Hydroxychloroquine, COVID-19 and the role of the rheumatologist'. EULAR Past-President Professor Johannes W. Bijlsma comments:

“Rheumatologists, researchers, and patient partners must advocate for the appropriate distribution and use of HCQ, as millions of people with rheumatic diseases worldwide depend on HCQ to control disease activity and maintain quality of life.

“At this time, ballooning infection rates threaten to overwhelm the capacity of healthcare systems worldwide. Safe and effective therapies for COVID-19 are desperately needed. We, like many physicians, hope well-designed studies will demonstrate effective drugs against COVID-19 infection. However, at the present time there is no evidence from controlled trials that this is the case for HCQ. Given that, as of yet, there is unknown benefit against COVID-19, provisions should be made to ensure adequate supply for all indications in which this drug has proven benefit and has received approval, particularly for our patients with rheumatic diseases.

“Until such evidence is available, as rheumatologists we must advocate for individuals in whom the safety and efficacy of HCQ is established. Lastly, we recognise that fair resource allocation ultimately depends upon separation of responsibilities. While it is our duty to advocate for our patients, it is at the same time our responsibility to respect the difficult decisions made by the larger medical and patient communities in these uncertain times.”

About EULAR

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with RMDs. EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of RMDs. To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with RMDs by the EU institutions through advocacy action.

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Notes to Editors

Citation

Graef ER, Liew JW, Putman MS On behalf of COVID-19 Global Rheumatology Alliance, *et al*
Festina lente: hydroxychloroquine, covid-19 and the role of the rheumatologist
Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases Published Online First: 15 April 2020. doi: 10.1136/annrheumdis-2020-217480, <https://ard.bmj.com/content/early/2020/04/15/annrheumdis-2020-217480>

EULAR has launched the COVID-19 rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases reporting database, a European paediatric and adult database to monitor and report outcomes of COVID-19 occurring in patients with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases with the support of the Global Rheumatology Alliance:

https://www.eular.org/eular_covid19_database.cfm

EULAR has released guidance for patients in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance addresses typical questions that patients with RMDs have and recommends protective measures both for patients and the health care workforce. More information and a video can be found here:

https://www.eular.org/policy_statement_on_covid_19.cfm