

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS – A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM CRYING OUT FOR NEW TREATMENTS

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Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a widespread inflammatory disease which affects hands, feet, knees, wrists, ankles, shoulders, neck, jaw and elbows. While the precise causes are not known, it appears that the immune system attacks the tissues lining these joints causing inflammation. Swelling happens when the body responds to the attack by producing too much lubricating (synovial) fluid. Joints become painful, swollen, stiff and, as the process continues, deformed from damage to the cartilage and other soft tissue.

RA usually develops between the ages of 25 and 50 and affects more women than men. It can lead to inflammation of connective tissue, blood vessels and organs, resulting in general feelings of ill-health.

It is estimated that 2-3% of the total population are living with RA and most have daily joint pain. Some also experience depression, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness as the disease interferes with their ability to work and carry out normal daily activities. Many people are forced to stop work within the first 12 months after diagnosis with this chronic illness. This has a major impact on the economy, not only in terms of healthcare but also in relation to lost earnings and production.

Current Treatments

The main aim of treating RA treatments is to suppress inflammation and prevent joint destruction.

Disease-Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs), also known as slow-acting anti-rheumatic drugs (SAARDs) are the principal form of treatment for RA. Treatment with this form of treatment should be started in an early stage of the disease, in order to help prevent joint deformity and disability. Common side-effects of DMARDs include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, diarrhea, or mouth ulcers. However these drugs can also cause lung, liver and kidney damage and affect fertility in males.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can provide pain relief. While they reduce inflammation they do not stop the disease from progressing. NSAIDs are known to cause gastrointestinal problems, such as gastric ulcers.

Corticosteroids, sometimes known as glucocorticoids, are very potent anti-inflammatory, immunosuppressive drugs that are sometimes prescribed in moderate to severe RA, where DMARDs and NSAIDs are not providing effective in the management of the disease. Side effects of this therapy can include weight gain, hypertension (high blood pressure) and osteoporosis.

References:

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