



**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Asian Countries Cannot Afford To Ignore the Cost of Rheumatoid Arthritis**

- Early Diagnosis and Treatment for Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis Urgently Needed to Relieve Social, Economic and Personal Disease Burden -
- *New Initiative Launched to Highlight the Need to Reassess Treatment Approaches in Asia-Pacific Region -*

*Monday September 14, 2009, Singapore* – A new initiative launched today by the Asia-Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) aims to raise awareness of the need to diagnose and treat rheumatoid arthritis (RA) early in order to relieve the enormous social, economic and personal burden the disease places on patients, communities and governments across the region.

The ***Every Day Counts*** campaign has been developed to highlight the fact that for every day a patient with RA remains undiagnosed and untreated he pays an unnecessary personal price. At the same time, society and communities face a significant financial cost through increased unemployment and welfare payments, and greater healthcare spending on extended hospital stays.

“In times of economic uncertainty and ageing populations countries simply can’t afford to have people with chronic illnesses needlessly out of work and draining valuable government budgets,” said Dr. Ho-Youn Kim, President, Asia-Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR). “Treatments do exist that have been proven to reduce the burden of this disease and widespread adoption of early diagnosis and treatment regimens could help to significantly reduce the cost of this disease to both societies and individuals.”

“Early effective treatment may not only postpone, slow, or even stop disease progression but also decrease costs by preserving productivity and reducing the need for surgery, hospital admissions and social service utilization,” continued Dr. Kim. “We hope that this initiative will help to highlight the need to treat RA early and effectively, because every day that a patient remains untreated has far reaching consequences.”

### **Burden of Disease**

The World Health Organization assesses the economic burden of RA on three levels—direct, indirect and psychosocial costs.<sup>1</sup> Direct costs to governments can be substantial. For example in the United States, a systematic review revealed that the average annual medical cost associated with RA is US\$5,720 per patient of which in-patient cost is the largest component.<sup>2</sup> Across Asia-Pacific the costs are equally high. For instance:

- In Korea, the economic burden of RA is estimated to be US\$624.9 million, equivalent to 0.11 per cent of the GNP.<sup>3</sup>
- In China, Japan and Taiwan RA affects 0.3 per cent of the population in each country—or 4 million, 380,000 and 69,000 people respectively.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>
- In Australia, arthritis costs A\$24 billion each year in healthcare, lost time at work, shortened lives, and years spent with disability.<sup>7</sup>
- In Thailand, the average societal cost of RA is estimated to be US\$2,682, 41.4 per cent of a patient’s average annual income. Direct and indirect costs are estimated to be US\$2,135 and US\$547 per patient per year, respectively.<sup>8</sup>
- In Malaysia, RA affects about 0.5 per cent of adults between the ages of 25 and 50.<sup>9</sup>



Indirect costs such as morbidity (productivity losses borne by the individual, their family, society and employer due to illness) and mortality (the present value of lost production due to premature death caused by illness) are also substantial. Indeed, work disability among people with RA is significantly higher than in the general population. Research has shown that two-thirds of people with RA lose an average of 39 working days each year.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, another study demonstrated that nearly a quarter of patients experience a reduction in income.<sup>11</sup>

Treating only the symptoms of RA can reduce a person's lifespan by about 10 years.<sup>12</sup> Without proper treatment, people with RA face a life-long battle with a disease that results in serious joint damage and disability.

Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) are currently the first line of treatment for RA. RA patients treated with DMARDs experience suppressed disease activity and reduced joint damage. However, oral DMARDs such as methotrexate have not been able to fully prevent gradual joint deterioration. With the development of biologic agents, remission (full suppression of disease activity with no worsening of joint damage) is now a realistic therapeutic goal in a greater proportion of patients. These agents can suppress disease activity directly and effectively, slow or stop progression of joint/radiologic damage, and prevent further loss of quality of life.<sup>13</sup>

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### **Notes to editors**

#### **ABOUT THE *EVERY DAY COUNTS* CAMPAIGN**

*Every Day Counts*—a new initiative from APLAR—aims to raise awareness of the need to diagnose and treat rheumatoid arthritis early. Activities will be taking place to reach doctors, patients and governments across the Asia-Pacific region throughout the year.

#### **ABOUT APLAR**

APLAR's mission and goals focus on providing state-of-the-art care to patients with arthritis and other musculoskeletal diseases through the continuous professional development of members, increasing the awareness and understanding of rheumatic diseases, patient advocacy and empowerment, and fostering research in the field of rheumatic diseases. APLAR was established in 1963 in Sydney and is affiliated to the ILAR (International League of Associations for Rheumatology).

#### **SUPPORT FOR THIS CAMPAIGN**

This activity is proudly supported by Wyeth.



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