The Importance of Raising Awareness About Rheumatoid Arthritis

by AMY MANLEY

The Invisible Disease

One of the most difficult aspects of RA is the misconceptions that surround it. RA is often referred to as the invisible disease, as patients often feel invisible to the public and alone in their suffering.

In order to stop the disease from keeping this name, awareness is key. It's important that the myths are exposed and that a common understanding of RA is created. You can do your part in creating awareness by educating yourself on the topic and then sharing this information with others.

Increasing Understanding

RA is one of the least understood conditions. Many people who believe they have an understanding of RA are actually educated through misconceptions, and have little understanding of the facts. One of the main reasons this condition is misunderstood is because unlike many other conditions that show on the outside, the symptoms of RA cannot be seen by others, only felt by the person who has it.

The three main symptoms of RA are pain, stiffness, and fatigue. While these symptoms are difficult to live with and take away from the patients quality of life, because of their lack of visibility, many people find they're difficult to understand.

Debunking the Myths

There are five myths about arthritis, and creating awareness can only be done by debunking these myths.

- **Arthritis occurs in older people –** This is a common misconception, but it's important to remember that any form of arthritis, including RA, isn't based on age. RA effects 1.3 million Americans, and can occur in young adults, and even children and teens. When RA occurs during the early years it's referred to as juvenile RA. In fact, over 300,000 children in the United States alone have been diagnosed with RA.

- **Everyone gets arthritis, aches and pains are a normal part of life –** While stiffness can occur during your waking hours as you age, the stiffness and pain that occurs with RA is much more severe. Due to the severity of pain that occurs with this condition, it must be treated by a medical professional and can truly compromise your quality of life.

- **RA is less common than other diseases –** While it would be nice if this was true, millions of people suffer from RA. In fact, 46 million adults and 300,000 children suffer from RA or another form of arthritis in the United States.

- **All doctors treat arthritis –** Actually, doctors who specialize in treatment of arthritis are the ones who will offer the best form of treatment. These doctors are called rheumatologists, and they will work along with

your primary care physician to ensure you get the best level of treatment.

- **RA isn’t affected by weight –** While weight doesn’t cause the condition, it can play a role in your side-effects. Often, doctors will prescribe medication along with different lifestyle changes that include diet and exercise.

Spreading Awareness

Once you’ve become educated, you can share that information with others to help spread the word. Informational articles and updates about facts you’ve learned can both have a big impact on awareness. Social networking sites offer the perfect platform for sharing information with others and helping to encourage sharing among friends, family, and acquaintances.