

Behind the scenes in arthritis care

By Lynnette Horwath

If you are reading this, you probably treat patients with arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation is here to help. We provide assistance for both the medical professional and for those with any of the more than 120 forms of arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation exists to support arthritis-related efforts in Wisconsin and to fulfill our mission: taking the lead in the prevention, control and cure of arthritis and related diseases.

Unless you are a rheumatologist, physiatrist, or orthopedic surgeon you may not have a strong background in treating chronic pain or rheumatic diseases. The Arthritis Foundation's Health Promotion Department can provide information or resources to assist you. For example, our Community Services Coordinator recently received a call from a pediatrician in a rural area of Wisconsin. He had seen a brief article on juvenile arthritis in a local paper during Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Week. The physician treats a young girl with juvenile arthritis, and he requested information that would assist him in caring for her. In addition to the juvenile arthritis information the Foundation provided, he was made aware of juvenile arthritis programs and other resources that he can suggest to this child's family.

The Arthritis Foundation Web site (www.arthritis.org) features current information on arthritis and is a good place to become acquainted with the Foundation. We offer many excellent brochures for physician offices—some available in Spanish as well as English. Books and videos are also available, including *Arthritis Foundation's Guide to Alternative Therapies*, which provides a brief update on a wide variety of nontraditional therapies that patients may ask about.

Trained volunteers staff a state-wide Information and Referral Line (800.242.9945). They are available to counsel people with arthritis, and they make referrals to other resources if callers need assistance beyond the scope of Arthritis Foundation services. For example, patients can get help connecting to pharmaceutical programs that offer special discounts on prescription medications and to businesses that handle adaptive equipment and assistive devices to meet their needs.

Medical professionals are generally well acquainted with the large self-care component that accompanies a chronic disease like diabetes. However, there is often less awareness of the significant positive outcomes of appropriate self-care for patients with arthritis. Arthritis Foundation exercise (P.A.C.E. and Aquatics) and self-help courses are evidence-based effective courses for adults. Additionally, the Foundation offers an array of juvenile arthritis programs, including a 6-day residential camp for children

ages 9–17, public forums, health fairs, support groups and advocacy endeavors that involve people in effective self-care of their arthritis.

Finally, the Wisconsin Chapter offers professional education forums, seminars, and conferences across the state that provide valuable insight into arthritis care and treatment. Specific programs can be developed for your area, depending on local needs and resources available.

If you don't know what the Foundation can offer patients in your area, please encourage them to call the Arthritis Foundation. Recently, a Foundation volunteer reported that she lived 26 years of her adult life dealing with many serious complications of rheumatoid arthritis, and no one had ever mentioned the Arthritis Foundation to her! Now, she is a walking advertisement for Foundation programs and services as she takes part in several volunteer opportunities. She is actively helping others with arthritis in the Eau Claire area, and she says that her quality of life has improved as a result.

The Foundation is especially interested in partnering with you. By recommending Foundation programs, you strongly encourage your patients' participation. Although the Foundation is a small organization with limited resources and programs, we have a significant interest in assisting you in meeting identified needs in your area. The Arthritis Foundation is here for you and for your patients. Please call 800.242.9945 or 414.321.3933 with questions or for more information.

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