

First, National AS Life Impact Study of Ankylosing Spondylitis Identifies Need for Parent, Physician Awareness

When kids or teens experience aching joints and stiffness it may be more than growing pains. It may be ankylosing spondylitis, which can go undiagnosed for years and years, leading to serious problems later on in life. The findings, generated from the Spondylitis Association National AS Life Impact Study and reported in the June 15 issue of "Arthritis Care and Research" highlight a need for greater awareness and diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

"Many children can have arthritis of the spine for years, but it can go overlooked and untreated," said Robert Warren, MD, who collaborated on the study and publication. Dr. Warren is Chief of rheumatology services at Texas Children's Hospital and associate professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine. "We need to diagnose this illness early and provide appropriate medications and other therapy."

The life impact study commissioned by the SAA involved more than 2,000 AS patients. Results were collected from a mail survey, which gathered a range of information including analysis of work-related disability, functional impairment, self-reported quality of life and spinal involvement. A team of researchers led by Millicent Stone, MD, University of Toronto, analyzed results of the study.

"By surveying individuals with AS, we have learned that many people visit multiple doctors before receiving a diagnosis and that adults with childhood onset disease experience much greater impairment during later life," says Jane Bruckel, executive director and co-founder of the SAA. "AS strikes

people very young in life and is more prevalent than multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis and Lou Gehrig's disease combined. With new, effective medical options available for AS, early diagnosis and proper medical care can have significant impact on managing the disease." While back pain is the primary symptom of AS in adults, children often experience other symptoms of the disease. Common symptoms of juvenile onset AS can include:

- Ongoing or recurrent joint pain, including neck or back pain
- Pain around the knees, bottom of the feet and ankles
- Pain and stiffness that is usually worse in the morning
- Pain and stiffness that improves with exercise and worsens with immobility
- Swelling in the joints or other areas of the body, including where the ligaments such as the Achilles tendon attaches to the bone

"It is common for children to experience 'growing pain,' but symptoms of joint aches and pains that last for weeks are unusual," says Dr. Warren. "Parents who notice these

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symptoms in children should speak with their physician and determine if they should see a pediatric rheumatologist. With early diagnosis and proper treatment, children with AS can experience significant relief of symptoms and potentially impact the long-term effects of the disease."

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