SPONDYLOARTHROPATHIES

Reading the signs

Information regarding the onset of spondyloarthritis (SpA) is currently lacking. Marena Rojas-Vargas and colleagues, on behalf of the Registro Español de Espondiloartritis de la Sociedad Española de Reumatología (REGISPONSER), have assessed data from this registry to fill in some of the gaps relating to our knowledge of the early stages of SpA, and now report their findings in *Rheumatology*.

“...inflammatory back pain was the most common symptom in the groups as a whole and in all patient subgroups...”

Members of the working group selected patients with a disease course of ≤ 2 years from the onset of symptoms or from when the first sign attributable to the

disease appeared. The characteristics of three subgroups of patients (the REGISPONSER-Early cohort)—those with ankylosing spondylitis (AS), psoriatic SpA (Ps-SpA) and undifferentiated SpA (uSpA)—are outlined.

The mean age of the total group of 140 patients at symptom onset was 41.2 ± 13.7 years; this value was higher in the group of Ps-SpA patients than in those with AS or uSpA by at least 10 years. Diagnosis of the diseases, both as a total group and as subgroups, was made, on average, <1 year after onset of symptoms, which is important for implementing treatment. In terms of symptoms, inflammatory back pain was the most common symptom in the groups as a whole and in all patient subgroups (72%, 26% and 56% for the AS, Ps-SpA and uSpA groups, respectively). The other most common first sign of AS and uSpA was sacroiliac syndrome, whereas Ps-SpA

patients most commonly experienced arthritis of the upper and lower limbs. At the time of inclusion in the registry, peripheral arthritis was the most common characteristic of Ps-SpA patients, whereas enthesitis and uveitis were commonly present in AS and uSpA patients. Not unexpectedly, all AS patients experienced sacroiliitis, as assessed by radiography.

As the authors point out, the REGISPONSER-Early study “highlights the need to define the initial stages of SpA, and to carry out a close follow-up of these cohorts to expand our knowledge of the course and prognosis of this condition, and to determine the response to treatment.”

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Original article Rojas-Vargas, M. *et al.* First signs and symptoms of spondyloarthritis—data from an inception cohort with a disease course of two years or less (REGISPONSER-Early). *Rheumatology (Oxford)* **48**, 404–409 (2009).