

'Switching off' early stage rheumatoid arthritis

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Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a painful and often debilitating disease which inflames the joints and can lead to bone and cartilage destruction. The longer the disease is active the more destructive the damage to the joints. However, Rheumatologists at Birmingham have identified a window in the progression of RA during which the disease could be more effectively controlled and even 'switched off'.

Working with international colleagues, Dr Karim Raza has also discovered that the development of rheumatoid arthritis in patients with early joint inflammation can be quite accurately predicted using simple tests. These early months are crucial in terms of getting a diagnosis and receiving treatment.

Dr Raza, lead investigator from the University's Medical School, says: 'Delays in the initiation of therapy for RA are associated with worsening outcomes. Unfortunately many patients do not seek early medical attention and delay for an average of 3 months before seeing their GP, due to a lack of knowledge about the disease.'

'The 'earlier the better principle' is applied almost universally by physicians in the context of the initiation of therapy in cancer... and we should be applying the same principle for RA.'

'Effective public engagement and raising awareness of the disease is the key to translating advances in the research in the disease into benefit for patients with new onset RA.'

The team are particularly concerned about patients of South Asian origin as they delay seeking medical help longer than those from other backgrounds. Dr Raza and his team want to start clinical trials in selected patient groups, based on the 'earlier the better principle' to test the ability to target interventions to significantly regulate the course of the disease.

[Arthritis press release \(/news/latest/2010/09/15sept-rheumatoid.aspx\)](/news/latest/2010/09/15sept-rheumatoid.aspx)