

The Danish approach to rheumatic diseases inspires other European countries

- **EULAR 2022 CONGRES**
- **COPENHAGEN, 1-4 JUNE 2022**

A LONG HISTORY WITHIN RHEUMATIC DISEASES

At their 75th years anniversary, the **European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR)** went back to the roots. EULAR was founded in 1947 at an event in Copenhagen, and the same city was selected in 2022 to celebrate this milestone. The EULAR 2022 Congress was an extremely professional hybrid event conducted in close collaboration with the community behind the congress and the local organizing committee. More than 14,000 delegates from over 130 countries participated in the congress that focused on rheumatic diseases affecting more than 120 million people in Europe.

EULAR works to position rheumatology as an important, interesting, and essential field of medicine that is seen at the same level as other major specialties. To support this, a legacy activity was initiated evolving around a European campaign based on the Danish example. The campaign showcased a best practice example focusing on the value of a multidisciplinary approach for successful treatment and pointed to the need for more professional personnel and treatment.

A EULAR ORGANISATION WITH THREE PILLARS

Over the years, the EULAR collaboration has matured and grown stronger. The current organisation consists of three pillars:

- The people with arthritis/rheumatism
- The health professionals in rheumatology (HPR)
- The scientific societies of rheumatology of all the European nations.

The organisation arranges coordinated training courses in member countries, with transdisciplinary options for participation based on the group the members belong to. In some countries, training at EULAR courses is a mandatory prerequisite for practicing as a professional doctor in the field. As clearly expressed in the legacy activity - a European campaign based on the Danish example - it is essential to have a multidisciplinary approach for successful treatment.

THE FIRST EULAR HYBRID CONGRESS EVER

The EULAR 2022 congress was held both virtually and on-site in Copenhagen,



Photo: Wonderful Copenhagen

offering the first-ever hybrid congress experience. EULAR successfully implemented this new and highly innovative congress structure, offering a combination of virtual and on-site sessions and activities in parallel meetings.

Rheumatic diseases affect more than 120 million people in Europe, and early diagnosis and treatment are essential to lower the effects of this group of crippling diseases. If treatment starts more than a few months after the first symptoms, there may already be irreversible damage to the bones and joints.

EULAR 2022 was an important event for European collaboration on research within rheumatic diseases and the exchange of results among members of EULAR. The high level of participation in the congress, as well as contributions to the preparatory work, reflects the need to address this important disease area. The community is highly motivated by the need for more experts to treat patients, and the congress and its training programmes, scientific publications, and professional networks and committees have a substantial impact on the stakeholders. At the political level, advocacy groups across Europe communicate the need for rheumatoid specialists to treat an ageing population.

Annamaria Iagnocco,
EULAR President:

"2022 was an extraordinary year for EULAR, marking not only our first-ever hybrid congress but also our 75th anniversary! The EULAR 2022 Congress will offer a cutting-edge congress experience that will only be enhanced by the outstanding celebrations of the EULAR jubilee of the three EULAR pillars and the EULAR communities."

Copenhagen is an exceptionally significant city for EULAR, marking the location of our first-ever EULAR Congress (75 years ago). We look forward to going back to a city that acknowledges our organisation and supports its strategies, aiming to reduce the impact of RMDs on those afflicted and to improve their social position and quality of life."

INSPIRATION FROM THE DANISH APPROACH

As part of their legacy bid to the EULAR 2022, **The Danish Rheumatism Association**, (the Danish hosting organization) presented the Danish example of waiting lists for specialist appointments guaranteed by law not to exceed four weeks. The Danish treatment strategy focuses on early intervention and multidisciplinary collaboration to offer the best individual treatment, including healthy lifestyle, rehabilitation, and self-management for each patient. While it is an inspirational initiative that can lift the quality of treatment, it is still important to raise the need for more rheumatologists and doctors who are specialists in the field of rheumatology.

Beyond the congress, EULAR continues to offer scientific communication and publishing, international training courses, coordinated advocacy for rheumatic diseases, better and faster diagnosis, improved standards for treatment etc.

LEGACY PROCESS



Strategic goals and societal needs

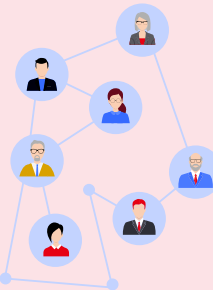
EULAR 2022 showed a special commitment to the following UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- #3 Good Health and Well-being
- #4 Quality Education
- #10 Reduced Inequalities
- #17 Partnerships for the Goals



Objective

The objective was to raise awareness about increasing the workforce and the quality of treatment by sharing the Danish best practice example. The Danish approach includes early intervention, multi-disciplinary collaboration, and securing that each medical faculty host a rheumatology department. The objective supports the rapidly increasing mentor programme for young researchers, EMEUNET, which has more than 3,000 members throughout Europe.



Stakeholder involvement

Copenhagen Legacy Lab facilitated two virtual workshops with relevant stakeholders from the Danish Rheumatology Society and international decisionmakers from EULAR before the congress.



Activities

EULAR and relevant Danish stakeholders decided to collaborate around a specific legacy activity:

- A European campaign showcasing the Danish treatment strategy, with a best practice example focusing on the value of a multidisciplinary approach for successful treatment.



Outputs (immediately after the activity)

The local organising committee launched the European campaign based on the Danish example during the 'Opening Plenary Session' of EULAR 2022 and made it public on YouTube and relevant websites afterwards. The campaign has been seen by more than 11,000 people and is being shared on social media.

Link to the campaign (Danish Example at 19:30 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHXhLaPRDzc>



Outcomes (+6-12 months - changed behaviour)

The European campaign based on the Danish example supported the clear message from EULAR 2022 concerning the need for more professional personnel and treatment.

As a follow up, EULAR has announced that they will set up a project for data collection to get a better overview of how rheumatism is treated in different countries. This will help define the gaps and advocate for an increase of the workforce in rheumatology in countries, where a shortage has been identified. A comparative database will be an important tool for the national EULAR members and not the least the EULAR advocacy group.



Impact (+1 year – societal value)

With an ageing population, the disease will become more common, affecting the quality of life of the individual, and the economic performance of society. The many participants and clear messages from the congress will raise further attention and political support for more resources to professional development.



Potential legacy (+1-3 years and beyond)

There is still a high need for developing EULAR activities to attract young professionals in the field of rheumatology. The European campaign will continue to serve as a best practice example for how communities can improve rheumatological care across Europe and beyond.

The European campaign will, together with the contribution from EULAR 2022, continue to be used by EULAR to support their overall focus areas. The work will for example be used for a patient conference to showcase the real-life effects of long-term collaboration, as well as encourage the societies to work together on projects relating to the EULAR Manifesto.

EULAR will continue to monitor if the quality of treatment and/or the number of rheumatologists increases. A potential increase in development will be based on the existing baseline vs EULAR's goals.