

## *Orthopaedic Connection*

### **Rheumatoid Arthritis! Not Just a Joint Disease**

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*Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

Rheumatoid arthritis is something most of my patients have heard of, but don't really understand. No one has taken the time to explain it to them. I plan to change that.

As a type of arthritis it is nowhere near as prevalent as osteoarthritis.

#### **What Is RA?**

It is an inflammatory arthritis affecting the synovial lining of the joints. The disease produces substances that cause destruction of the joint surface covering the ends of bones (articular cartilage). Not only is the joint surface destroyed by the RA, but the structures supporting the joint are also seriously damaged.

If that were not bad enough, inflammatory cells in your general circulation cause harmful effects on your heart, blood vessels, bones and other bodily tissues.

RA is much more invasive than osteoarthritis, which might only affect one or two joints and never causes severe changes in many other areas of the body besides the joints.

#### **Extra-articular**

Extra-articular refers to conditions in RA that occur outside the joint. In RA there is a bunch. That is what makes RA the devastating disease that it is. The joint pain, swelling and deformities make people miserable and make function difficult. Then you add on top of that all the other co-morbidities (doctor word) that make RA even worse.

#### **The Co-morbidities**

\* Heart disease is perhaps the most common. The risk of heart attack in RA patients is twice as great compared to other arthritis patients. Gulp! RA patients are prone to pericarditis, an inflammation of the thin sac that encloses the heart.

\* Vasculitis occurs, which is an inflammatory damage of the blood vessels.

\* Depression, poor sleep, fatigue

\* Bone loss, osteoporosis

\* Obstructive pulmonary disease

\* Skin nodules, rashes

\* Peripheral neuropathy (nerve damage)

\* Eye problems

I feel like I have given you a load of bad news about the problems of Rheumatoid Arthritis. Unfortunately all of this is fact.

#### **There Is Hope**

I certainly want to point out that I do not take care of all of the extra-articular problems of RA.

If a person has RA, they in most cases need to have a Rheumatologist (an Internal Medicine Doctor who specializes in RA) care for them.

There are many things RA patients and their Rheumatologist can do to manage this very serious problem.

I would serve no purpose to go into detail here. Please know, however, that a Rheumatologist actively involved in an RA patient's care can be like a guardian angel to that patient.

The disease can be managed successfully by excellent Rheumatology and Orthopaedic Surgery care that I provide.

RA patients are some of my most appreciative patients, because their needs are so great.

**Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website**

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It gives access to all Website articles, Your Orthopaedic Connection and every GCH article from most recent to the first. Full text! It covers everything I do in the office and hospital.

Good Health. Good life. All the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush