

News

Office of Medical Information
The University of Texas

Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas

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****Public forum highlights international arthritis conference

DALLAS -- A free public forum on ankylosing spondylitis, a type of arthritis that may lead to stiffening and fusion of the spine, will take place at 7 p.m. Friday, April 12, at the Plaza of the Americas hotel in Dallas. The disease affects an estimated 25,000 people in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, most of them men.

The forum will feature talks by internationally recognized experts on medical and physical treatments and strategies for living with ankylosing spondylitis, as well as an update on recent research. A question and answer session will follow.

Advance registration is required. Those wishing to attend should call 1-800-777-8189.

The Friday evening event will be one of the highlights of the Second International Conference on HLA-B27 Related Disorders, sponsored by the Harold C. Simmons Arthritis Research Center at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas April 10-14.

HLA-B27 is a genetically determined protein involved in the regulation of the immune system. It has been closely linked to the spondyloarthropathies, a group of arthritic diseases that affect about one percent of the general population. Ankylosing spondylitis, which usually strikes males between the ages of 16 and 35, is one of the spondyloarthropathies. Others are juvenile ankylosing spondylitis, which affects children ages 7 to 18; reactive or inflammatory arthritis, which may strike the urinary or genital tracts and eyes, as well as the spine and large peripheral joints; arthritis associated with psoriasis; and enteropathic arthropathy, associated with inflammation of the bowel.

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The conference has been organized by Dr. Peter E. Lipsky, director of the Simmons Center, assisted by Dr. Joel D. Taurog, whose ongoing collaboration with Dr. Robert E. Hammer of Howard Hughes Medical Institute at UT Southwestern has resulted in the development of a highly authentic animal model of the spondyloarthropathies.

"This meeting will bring together all the major investigators studying HLA-B27 related disorders, and therefore should be a milestone in research on the spondyloarthropathies," said Dr. Lipsky. "We anticipate that new insights will emerge from the interaction of these scientists."

The connection between HLA-B27 and the spondyloarthropathies was first noted in 1973, when two groups of researchers--one in Los Angeles and one in London--reported simultaneously that the molecule was present in 90 percent of ankylosing spondylitis patients, but in only 7 percent of the normal population. In recent years, several lines of research have also suggested that spondyloarthropathies may result from exposure to infection. Speakers at the conference will discuss possible bacterial agents and the basic function and structure of the HLA-B27 molecule itself. Current animal models also will be analyzed.

Physicians attending the conference will be eligible to receive 28 hours of Category I credit from the American Medical Association.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.