

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Georgia Society of Rheumatology Participates in First Annual Rheumatic Disease Awareness Month

Nation's Leading Cause of Disability in the Spotlight this September

Atlanta, Georgia (August 8, 2016) – Georgia Society of Rheumatology is helping raise awareness about rheumatic diseases in Atlanta, Georgia this September during the first annual Rheumatic Disease Awareness Month, sponsored by the <u>American College of Rheumatology</u> (ACR) and its national public awareness campaign, <u>Simple Tasks</u>.

More than 52.5 million Americans – young and old – live with painful, debilitating, and life-threatening rheumatic diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis (RA), gout, lupus, Sjögren's, ankylosing spondylitis, and juvenile idiopathic arthritis. Rheumatic diseases are the nation's leading cause of disability, generating more than \$128 billion in health costs each year. These diseases often strike individuals in the prime of their lives and can lead to long-term disability and early death if not treated early and effectively.

Because rheumatic disease symptoms can be difficult to pinpoint and are sometimes dismissed as merely the aches and pains of getting older, people living with these diseases may go years before seeking treatment or receiving a correct diagnosis. Although there is no cure for rheumatic disease, early intervention by a trained rheumatologist can help patients manage symptoms and maintain a normal quality of life.

Parents of young children should also be wary of any inexplicable joint pain. An estimated 300,000 children live with painful juvenile idiopathic arthritis, which can lead to physical disability, blindness, and other complications if not treated early.

Symptoms of rheumatic disease vary by person and condition but may include:

- Joint or muscle pain, inflammation, swelling, redness, or stiffness;
- Eye irritation and inflammation;
- General fatigue, malaise, and fevers;
- Hair loss;
- Dry eyes or mouth;
- Chest pain; and
- Seizures or stroke.

"No one should have to live with chronic, persistent, and mysterious pain," said Dr. Joan Von Feldt, MD, MSEd, president of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR). "Seeing a rheumatologist within the first weeks and months of disease onset – what rheumatologists call the 'window of opportunity' – can dramatically improve long-term outcomes for patients, so it is important to know what symptoms to look for and when to ask for a referral to a trained specialist."

Once diagnosed, people living with rheumatic diseases can face significant healthcare obstacles, including a shortage of trained rheumatologists to treat their conditions and expensive co-pays for specialty therapies.

"Unfortunately, too many of our patients struggle to access and afford effective care and treatments for their rheumatic diseases," said Dr. Von Feldt. "Therefore, in addition to increasing awareness about symptoms and treatment options, Rheumatic Disease Awareness Month is also an opportunity to advance the health and well-being of those living with rheumatic disease by advocating for healthcare policies that help patients access safe, affordable, and effective healthcare."

Rheumatic Disease Awareness Month is sponsored by Simple Tasks, a national public awareness campaign from the American College of Rheumatology (ACR). People who are interested in learning more about rheumatic diseases and Rheumatic Disease Awareness Month activities are encouraged to visit the Simple Tasks website at www.SimpleTasks.org.

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About the Georgia Society of Rheumatology

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Georgia Society of Rheumatology (GSR) is to stimulate interest and increase knowledge of arthritis and rheumatic diseases among physicians, allied health professionals, and laymen.

Continuing Medical Education Mission Statement

The purpose of the Georgia Society of Rheumatology (GSR) is to stimulate interest and increase knowledge of arthritis and rheumatic diseases among physicians, allied health professionals, and laymen. Educational opportunities are provided during the annual two-day educational conference and throughout the year with the Metro-Atlanta Rheumatology Section (MARS). MARS meetings will be held monthly in the local Atlanta area to provided ongoing continuing medical education activities. The entire membership is invited to the MARS meetings.

GSR is committed to providing learning opportunities that meet the membership's needs. Needs assessments will be conducted during the year to determine educational topics. Programs Directors for GSR and MARS will be responsible for implementing and analyzing the needs assessment evaluations.

GSR annual meeting participants will be presented guest speakers, abstract presentations and other forms of learning such as the Thieves Market. MARS meeting participants will be presented with guest speakers who will lecture for approximately one hour and who will follow-up with audience discussion.

Potential participants will be informed of upcoming continuing medical education opportunities through direct mail, faxes and e-mail announcements. Participants will receive support materials to assist their learning and to comply with the Medical Association of Georgia's continuing medical education required documentation. At the end of each program, the participants will be asked to evaluate the learning activity. The program director will collect the written evaluations and analyze the information to determine the effectiveness of the program and to understand future needs of the membership.

Physician participants will include primarily rheumatologists and, secondarily orthopaedic surgeons, primary care physicians, internal medicine physicians, endocrinologists, dermatologists and radiologists.