

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF RHEUMATOLOGY

POSITION STATEMENT

SUBJECT: The Rheumatologist as Principal Care Physician
PRESENTED BY: Committee on Rheumatologic Care
FOR DISTRIBUTION TO: Members of the American College of Rheumatology
Medical Societies
Medicare Carriers/Private Insurers
Members of Congress

BACKGROUND:

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2 The patient with a rheumatic disease should never encounter a barrier when seeking an initial
3 consultation or receiving ongoing care from a rheumatologist. Rheumatologists should have the
4 option to be the principal care physician for patients with a rheumatic disease. The reasons for this
5 are several and include:
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- 7 1. Rheumatology, like other areas of medicine, has evolved into a highly complex specialty.
8 Advances in diagnostics and therapeutics have occurred at an unprecedented rate over the
9 last decade. It is the rheumatologist, and only the rheumatologist, who maintains expertise in
10 this highly specialized area of medicine.
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- 12 2. The current structure of residency programs in internal medicine and pediatrics generally
13 fails to provide adequate education and experience in rheumatology. As a result, general
14 practitioners do not have the opportunity to develop sophisticated skill sets comparable to
15 those of rheumatologists. Consequently, care of rheumatic diseases provided by general
16 practitioners could be suboptimal, inefficient and more costly.
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- 18 3. Rheumatologists receive 3 years of training in general medicine or pediatrics after the
19 completion of medical school. This training provides them with sufficient knowledge and
20 education to address many of the non-rheumatic problems that develop in their patients.
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- 22 4. Many of the patients treated by rheumatologists have single conditions. Duplicative care is
23 unnecessary and adds to the cost of health care.
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25 Patients want to be confident that they are receiving the best care from those with the most
26 knowledge and experience. Payors want to be confident that precious health care dollars are being
27 efficiently and effectively spent. Therefore, rheumatologists should serve as the principal care
28 physician for patients with rheumatic diseases.
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32 Approved by Board of Directors:

05/00, 03/04, 08/07, 08/11