

CONSUMER MEDIA PRESS RELEASE

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RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS IMPACTS MILLIONS OF AMERICANS BUT REMAINS SEVERELY UNDERFUNDED

American College of Rheumatology Research and Education Foundation Launches “Within Our Reach” Campaign to Raise Funds to Search for a Cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis

ATLANTA, GA (July 12, 2007) – Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) affects 2.1 million Americans and despite many advances in the understanding of the disease, funds for research remain limited and both the cause and a cure are still unknown. The American College of Rheumatology Research and Education Foundation (ACR REF) is working to accelerate RA research and expand financial support of this disease by launching the *Within Our Reach: Finding a Cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis* campaign. The new program is designed to raise unprecedented funds to search for a cure.

RA is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis and costs society more than \$80 billion each year. The disease affects more than one in every 200 Americans. However, research funding for RA averages as little as \$25.90 per patient and remains significantly low compared to other chronic diseases that affect far fewer people like lupus, diabetes and multiple sclerosis, which average \$330.00 per patient. Despite the lack of funding, research has led to more effective and aggressive, treatments as well as a better understanding of how to manage the disease.

“Therapy for patients with RA has improved dramatically, and we also have learned that early diagnosis is essential,” said Dr. James R. O’Dell, president of the REF. “While there is no cure, patients who receive treatment early feel better and are more likely to lead an active life. Painful symptoms including inflammation and joint damage can be minimized with early treatment and further research will continue to better patients’ lives and get us closer to a cure.”

Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms and Diagnosis

RA is a chronic, autoimmune disease that develops because certain cells of the immune system malfunction and attack healthy joints. It is far more common in women than many expect. Approximately 1 to 3 percent of women may develop RA in their lifetime, which is three times more common in women as in men. While symptoms most often begin between the fourth and sixth decades of life, RA can develop at any age.

Pain, stiffness, swelling, and limitation in the motion and function of multiple joints are the most common symptoms. Though joints are the principal body parts affected by RA, inflammation can develop in other organs as well. Additional warning signs also include:

- Loss of energy
- Low-grade fevers
- Loss of appetite
- Dry eyes and mouth from an associated condition known as Sjogren's syndrome

- Firm lumps called rheumatoid nodules beneath the skin in areas such as the elbow and hands

RA can be difficult to diagnose because it may begin gradually and many diseases behave in a manner similar to RA. Patients suspected of having RA should be evaluated by a rheumatologist, a physician with the necessary skill and experience to reach a precise diagnosis and develop the most appropriate treatment plan.

Patients can visit www.rheumatology.org/directory to find a rheumatologist in their area.

About *Within Our Reach: Finding a Cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis* Campaign

Within Our Reach is a national, multi-year fundraising campaign with a goal to raise \$30 million towards accelerating innovative research focused specifically on rheumatoid arthritis. It is the largest private fundraising campaign in the REF's history, which will tap a diverse donor base, supporting innovative research to learn more about the causes of RA and, ultimately, to find a cure. Since November, the campaign has received tremendous support from the pharmaceutical industry, biotech companies, physicians and patients.

"Today, more funding needs to be directed towards the kind of RA research that goes beyond treatment only - the kind of RA research that seeks to find a cure through better understanding of the causes of and preventions for this devastating disease," added Dr. O'Dell. "With the guidance of ACR Research and Education Foundation, *Within Our Reach* will allow more of this type of research to be conducted and together we can work to find a cure."

To learn more about rheumatoid arthritis and *Within Our Reach*, please visit www.WithinOurReach.info.

About the ACR Research and Education Foundation

The ACR Research and Education Foundation was established in 1985 as a 501(c)(3) with a mission to improve patients' lives through support of research and training that advances the prevention, treatment and cure of rheumatic diseases. Since its founding, the REF has promoted and advanced the field of rheumatology by funding research, training and education opportunities for clinicians, students, health professionals, researchers and academic institutions. On average, 90 cents of every dollar donated to the REF is used to fund its extensive award and grant program.

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