

NEWS

15th Anniversary of Croatian League Against Rheumatism

In 2007, the Croatian League Against Rheumatism celebrated 15th anniversary of its activity. It is the only non-profit citizens group at the national level that gathers patients with rheumatic diseases, specialists and other health (medical services) professionals involved in the treatment and rehabilitation of patients with rheumatic diseases.

The League was founded on December 14, 1992 in Varaždinske Toplice, as a legal successor of the Association of Rheumatic Patients of the City of Zagreb, which had been active since 1982. The League foundation was initiated by Professor Ivo Jajić, along with Želimir Vukosav, Tibor Littvay and Tonči Buljanović as the initiative board, accompanied by Professor Božidar Ćurković, MD, Professor Nataša Delimar, and medical doctors Goran Ivanišević, Ladislav Krapac, Ante Luetić, Željko Ostrogović and Ljubo Suton. From the modest begin-

nings, with the initiators' enthusiasm and efforts invested by others joining them over time, the Croatian League Against Rheumatism has grown up into a respectable association with approximately 3500 members in 11 county branches throughout Croatia.

The League's basic activities consist of providing information and education to patients with rheumatic diseases as well as to the population at large about the causes, symptoms, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of rheumatic diseases. The final goal is to upgrade their quality of life, to prolong their work ability and to reduce their disability as much as possible. The League has been qualified to educate health professionals in team work approach where rheumatic patient must have a central role.

The Croatian League Against Rheumatism has four committees (economic and promotional activities, legal service, publishing activities, and social and humanitarian activities) and four medical sections (inflammatory rheumatic diseases, degenerative rheumatic diseases, metabolic rheumatic diseases, and extra-articular rheumatic diseases).

The League is member of several international associations, i.e. EULAR (European League Against Rheumatism), ASIF (Ankylosing Spondylitis International Federation) and IOF (International Osteoporosis Foundation).

Since its foundation, the main office of the League is situated at the University Department of Rheumatology, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Sestre milosrdnice University Hospital in Zagreb. The first president was Professor Ivo Jajić, PhD,



Dr. T. Nemčić president of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism and ing. Z. Barišić, dr. S. Grazio, ing. T. Littvay, D. Majetić

and since 2001 the position has been held by Tomislav Nemčić, MD, specialist in physical medicine and rehabilitation from the same hospital.

The Croatian League Against Rheumatism carries out different activities such as organizing and holding popular lectures and public discussions for patients and all those interested in the subject. In the last period, a great number of such lectures and discussions have been delivered in various settings. The League is one of the founders of the National Board on the Bones and Joints Decade proclaimed by the World Health Organization. Therefore, in the last few years the activities were more intense in October, a month in which we annotate the Bones and Joints Decade is being celebrated. Thereby, first in Zagreb, and since the last year in some district centers (Split, Rijeka, Osijek, Pula and Slavonski Brod), ultrasound densitometry measurements were performed, those who were interested filled in screening tests for osteoporosis and were given advice on further treatment or measures of prevention and osteoporosis management.

The Croatian League Against Rheumatism brought the first National Standards on Treating Patients with Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Maybe the most visible action of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism is publishing the journal named REUMA (earlier Reumatičar). At the very beginning, Editor-in-Chief was Professor Jajić, in 1992 it was Goran Ivanišević, and from 1993 to 1997 Professor Božidar Ćurković. Since 1998, Assistant Professor Simeon Grazio holds the position of Editor-in-Chief, and the journal has since been published regularly 2-3 times a year, its quality has been standardized and its graphic design modernized. At the beginning, the journal was published in 500 copies *per* issue, whereas now it has reached 4000 copies. The journal is distributed by post free of charge to all members of the League and to pa-



Dr. Nemčić, president of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism and J. Kraus who received letter of recognition on behalf of the Clinical Hospital "Sestre milosrdnice".

tients during their treatment and rehabilitation in special hospitals for medical rehabilitation.

Until today, 24 booklets for patients have been published, most of them in several editions. In these popular booklets, the most common rheumatic diseases and topics common to all rheumatic patients have been elaborated. The following booklets have been published: Ivo Jajić (with Goran Ivanišević as co-author in the first edition): Neck pain; Ivo Jajić: Low-back pain; Ivo Jajić (with Goran Ivanišević as co-author in the first edition): Rheumatoid arthritis; Ivo Jajić (with Goran Ivanišević as co-author in the first edition): Ankylosing spondylitis; Ivo Jajić and Zrinka Jajić: Psoriatic arthritis; Ivo Jajić and Zrinka Jajić (with Branka Oklobdžija as co-author in the first edition): Gout; Zrinka Jajić and Ivo Jajić: Osteoporosis; Ivo Jajić and Zrinka Jajić: Osteoarthrosis; Ladislav Krapac: Arthrosis of the hand; Vlasta Urban-Tripović: Shoulder pain; Jadranka Morović-Vergles and Ksenija Berdnik-Gortan: Systemic lupus erythematosus; Jadranka Morović-Vergles and Ksenija Berdnik-Gortan: Reactive arthritis; Zrinka Jajić: Sjögren's syndrome; Ivo Jajić: Polymyalgia rheumatica; Simeon Grazio and Branimir Anić: Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs; Branimir Anić and Simeon Grazio: Glucocorticoids in inflamma-

tory rheumatic diseases; Simeon Grazio and Tomislav Nemčić: Fibromyalgia; Zrinka Jajić: Algodystrophic syndrome; Simeon Grazio and Frane Grubišić: Alternative and complementary treatment of rheumatic diseases; Simeon Grazio and Mateja Znika: Safe exercise guide for people with rheumatoid diseases; Simeon Grazio: Carpal tunnel syndrome; Simeon Grazio and Branimir Anić: Raynaud's syndrome; Simeon Grazio and Branimir Anić: Pain and painkillers in rheumatology; and Simeon Grazio and Mateja Znika: Physical therapy in musculoskeletal pain management. The booklets are also distributed free of charge.

County branches of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism are under guidance of eminent rheumatologists and specialists of physical medicine. An exception is the Zagreb district branch, which is lead by a layman, and it should actually be the true model intended, with health professionals taking the role of expert advisors.

Financial resources are needed to provide numerous activities, publishing the journal and booklets in particular. All those working at the League are volunteers. A part of financial support has been collected from membership fee, and only on few occasions we received financial support from governmental institutions. However, in 2007 the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare approved a project proposed by the Croatian League

Against Rheumatism. Financial support has been largely acquired through promotion (advertisement) messages appearing in the journal, donations and sponsor contracts with pharmaceutical companies.

Since 2005, on the initiative by Mrs. Vlasta Sršek-Cerkvenik and as part of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism, support groups (SUPRA groups) have been organized. Until now, five groups have been organized in the City of Zagreb, their activities being performed at premises allocated by the local government. Each group has 5 to 10 full members and a great number of support members. Support members are being active occasionally, mostly as auditorium at classic lectures. Full members are acting regularly and proactively, gathering 3 times a month with an aim of ensuring daily medical exercise (according to the grade of disease, living conditions and individual characteristics), healthy eating habits, education of handy and PC handling, and society netting. Patients must be aware that in spite of their disease they can influence their life quality by modifying their lifestyle and adapting it to the limits imposed by the disease. It is planned that SUPRA groups in the Zagreb district start working very soon.

In these 15 years of the existence of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism, numerous individuals, institutions and companies have contributed to its successful work. On November 23, 2007, on the occasion of



League Against Dr. T. Nemčić, president of the Croatian League Against Rheumatism

the 15th anniversary, the Croatian League Against Rheumatism assembly took place in the multimedia conference hall at Sestre milosrdnice University Hospital. Under the chairmanship of Assistant Professor Simeon Grazio, Tomislav Nemčić, MD, as the League president presented certificates of merit to the League members Dunja Barak-Smešny, Zvonimir Barišić, Ksenija Berdnik-Gortan, Zdenko Cepak, Božidar Ćurković, Vera Došen, Simeon Grazio, Goran Ivanišević, Zrinka Jajić, Ladislav Krapac, Tibor Littvay, Ante Luetić, Jadranka Morović-Vergles, Tomislav Nemčić, Olga Novak, Ljubo Suton, Ivan Šantek, Ana Šoša-Kosor, Vlasta Urban Tripović, Tonko Vlak and Želimir Vukosav. The institutions, companies and special hospitals that have offered strong support and backup to the League's actions were presented letters of recognition: Belupo, Biokovka Special Hospital, Daruvarske Toplice Special Hospital, Dietpharm-Fidifarm, Sestre milosrdnice University Hospital, Krapinske Toplice Special Hospital, Lipik Special Hospital, Oktal Pharma and Varaždinske Toplice Special Hospital. The Croatian League Against Rheumatism honorary membership has been awarded to its principal initiator, Professor Ivo Jajić.

What else would we like to carry out? One of the

important aims is greater membership in terms of numbers and district centers. We also want to organize exercises for rheumatic patients on a regular basis, which is, unfortunately, associated with additional expenses. We will try to enlarge the number of lectures for patients and to ensure space for gathering patients with rheumatic diseases and all those interested. New booklets and reprints of the most popular booklets will be published. Instead of 2-3 issues of the journal Reuma, we are ready to publish 4 issues *per* year if financially possible. Besides this, we plan to complete the web version of all booklets on www.reuma.hr. All information about our activities, legal acts, information about REUMA and useful links are also available on this web-site. One can also print out the admission form. Such a way of presenting rheumatic diseases improves the understanding and acceptance of the problems associated with rheumatic diseases by the society and its institutions. The League is going to be active in the campaign for rheumatic patients' rights. We believe that the Croatian League Against Rheumatism will carry on with its activities for a long time, to the well-being of patients with rheumatic diseases.

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