

## Editorial

**Building the future of rheumatology: the role of national and international networks***Opportunities within EMEUNET and BRiTs*

Rheumatology is a rapidly expanding specialty, with exciting opportunities for both clinicians and academics. The evolution of international and national specialty organizations, such as EULAR and the British Society for Rheumatology (BSR), has actively supported the development and growth of fellow networks that aim to support and nurture the rheumatologists of tomorrow. These networks have a vital role in allowing members to engage with research and education, obtain mentorship, influence policy and develop leadership skills. In this editorial, we explore the value of such European networks and emerging national networks within countries such as the UK.

The Emerging EULAR NETwork (EMEUNET) is the European network of young clinicians and researchers in rheumatology [1]. Established in 2009, its aim is to promote education, mentoring and excellence in research as well as to enable aspiring young clinicians/academics to widen their collaborations and integrate with EULAR activities. EMEUNET membership is open to all clinicians, clinical academics and non-clinical rheumatology researchers under the age of 40 years, and currently consists of more than 1450 members. A working group formed by ~40 enthusiastic individuals (from 21 countries), chosen via an annual competitive process, oversees the network and undertakes its organizational role to facilitate the wider objectives of EMEUNET. The British Rheumatologists in Training (BRiTs) committee, established in 2015 (evolved from the previous BSR Rheumatologists At Training), consists of trainee representatives elected by their peers from each UK region. It has a pivotal role in communication and linking together a wide range of activities in the relevant BSR region.

Such networks represent the voice of rheumatologists in training, allowing them to influence the overall strategy of the societies they represent, such that they reflect the needs of their members. The EMEUNET working group is divided into seven subgroups to facilitate each of its priority areas: supporting, training and mentorship (education, peer-mentoring subgroups); promoting communication (social media, visibility, newsletters and country liaison subgroups); and to connect EMEUNET to wider relevant young networks (global affairs). Involvement and active participation within EULAR committees is actively encouraged; EMEUNET fellows now participate in EULAR Task Forces/endorsed recommendations as part of their standard operating procedures [2] (based on selection by respective steering committees). Members also contribute

to certain Standing Committees of EULAR, such as the EULAR Standing Committee of Education [3], the EULAR School of Rheumatology [4], EULAR executive and scientific committees.

Representatives within the BRiTs committee are elected to sit on various subcommittees of the BSR, including education and training, the Heberden Committee (which organizes the scientific programme for the annual conference), research and clinical affairs. The structure has the advantage that the committee can effectively influence the policies and activities of the society to reflect the views of its trainees and enhance communication between BRiTs and other BSR committees. Such national and international opportunities allow young fellows to gain significant insights and experience into organizing task forces, convening and chairing sessions at international conferences, shaping educational and scientific meetings according to their training needs, as well as encouraging future leaders who may eventually wish to undertake more prominent committee roles in forthcoming years.

One of the greatest benefits of EMEUNET is that it promotes research, education and productive collaboration amongst emerging rheumatologists in Europe. For instance, successful initiatives within the EMEUNET education subgroup have included development of the EULAR/EMEUNET Epidemiology and Immunology Courses and the EULAR Ambassador programme, designed to support first-time attendees at the EULAR annual conference. In partnership with the EULAR Standing Committee of Education, European-wide surveys exploring the discrepancies between rheumatology specialty programmes [5], self-reported competencies [6] and the educational needs and preferences of young clinicians and clinical researchers within rheumatology [7] have been performed. Such work can provide valuable perspectives into variations in training and assessment of rheumatology fellows across Europe that can help to guide future resources to standardize training. Understanding the current training landscape can provide seamless transitions between countries and departments for international exposure without interruptions in training.

A survey to explore perceptions, barriers and patterns of social media use among European rheumatology fellows [8] highlighted potential opportunities for novel ways of learning and communicating. Likewise, BRiTs have established a trainees' research network to promote collaborative working. The infrastructure in place allows any

UK trainee to upscale a noteworthy research project or audit nationally, thus maximizing the impact of their work and helping to develop their organizational and leadership skills.

Several resources for training and mentorship exist within EMEUNET and BRiTs. EMEUNET offers an initiative with the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* to train its members as journal reviewers under the supervision of senior academics. Mentor-mentee meetings at the annual ACR and EULAR conferences allow informal meetings between EMEUNET members and international experts to discuss possible career plans, research ideas and training opportunities. BRiTs and the BSR have developed a national mentorship programme for (academic and clinical) trainees as well as development of website resources to facilitate preparation for the Rheumatology Specialty Certificate Examination by the Royal College of Physicians.

Communication to its members and acting as a conduit for two-way communication is an essential part of EMEUNET and BRiTs. Similar national rheumatology fellow societies now exist in Spain, Italy, Austria and several others. They closely interlink with EMEUNET through country liaisons and individuals who participate in both organizations, often promoting initiatives from each other. EMEUNET publicizes relevant country-specific opportunities on their social media platforms, while national organizations promote the work of EMEUNET, making fellows aware of opportunities at an international level. Announcements of important educational events, research highlights from international conferences and jobs of interest across Europe are additionally facilitated by the EMEUNET newsletter and social media subgroups.

Benefits of such networks are often bidirectional, in that established rheumatologists and committees benefit from a fresh outlook and insights, execution of certain tasks (e.g. systematic literature reviews within task forces) and promotion of activities to a wider network. For young rheumatologists and fellows wanting to develop diverse skills, we strongly recommend engagement with the opportunities offered through such networks at an early stage. In particular, fellows with innovative ideas potentially benefit from having a stronger voice nationally and internationally with greater potential to implement their vision. The hard work involved within such working groups should not be underestimated, and disadvantages include its voluntary and time-consuming nature, additional effort outside usual working hours and requirement for the ability to multitask with competing demands. However, the camaraderie, rewards, proficiencies gained through active engagement and widened networks are incredibly worthwhile, with tremendous opportunities to contribute to advancing the specialty and improving the quality of patient care.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Sofia Ramiro and Anna Moltó (current and past chairs of EMEUNET, respectively) for reviewing the draft manuscript prior to submission.

**Funding:** No specific funding was received from any bodies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors to carry out the work described in this manuscript.

**Disclosure statement:** M.J. is the current co-leader of the EMerging EULAR Network (EMEUNET) education subgroup, the British Rheumatologists in Training (BRiTs) BSR Heberden committee representative and the BRiTs representative for the North-West of England. EN is the chair elect of EMEUNET and was previously also the Academic Representative for BRiTs. A.P.C. is the current chair of BRiTs and most recently an EMEUNET country liaison. M.B. has received honoraria and attended meetings sponsored by AbbVie, Bristol Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, Merck, Pfizer, Roche/Chugai, UCB Celltech, British Medical Journals Masterclass, Revalidaid, Sanofi Aventis, OnTRAC medics, Novartis and Kyowa kirin.

## Meghna Jani<sup>1</sup>, Elena Nikiphorou<sup>2,3</sup>, Adam P. Croft<sup>4</sup> and Marwan Bukhari<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Arthritis Research UK Centre for Epidemiology, Centre for Musculoskeletal Research, Division of Musculoskeletal and Dermatological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester, <sup>2</sup>Rheumatology Department, Whittington Hospital, <sup>3</sup>Academic Rheumatology Department, King's College London, London, <sup>4</sup>Rheumatology Research Group, Institute of Inflammation and Ageing, University of Birmingham, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham and <sup>5</sup>Department of Rheumatology, Royal Lancaster Infirmary, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, Lancaster, UK

Revised version accepted 22 December 2016

Correspondence to: Meghna Jani, Room 2.612, Stopford Building, Arthritis Research UK Centre for Epidemiology, Centre for Musculoskeletal Research, Division of Musculoskeletal and Dermatological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PT, UK.

E-mail: meghna.jani@manchester.ac.uk

## References

- 1 Emerging EULAR Network (EMEUNET). <http://emeunetular.org/> (October 2016, date last accessed). Follow us on Twitter @EMEUNET.
- 2 van der Heijde D, Aletaha D, Carmona L *et al.* 2014 Update of the EULAR standardised operating procedures for EULAR-endorsed recommendations. *Ann Rheum Dis* 2014;74:8-13.
- 3 EULAR Standing Committee on Education and Training. [http://www.eular.org/education\\_training.cfm](http://www.eular.org/education_training.cfm) (31 October 2016, date last accessed).
- 4 EULAR school of rheumatology. [http://www.eular.org/school\\_of\\_rheumatology.cfm](http://www.eular.org/school_of_rheumatology.cfm) (31 October 2016, date last accessed).
- 5 Sivera F, Ramiro S, Cikes N *et al.* Differences and similarities in rheumatology specialty training programmes

- across European countries. *Ann Rheum Dis* 2015;74:1183–7. 5p.
- 6 Sivera F, Ramiro S, Cikes N *et al.* Rheumatology training experience across Europe: analysis of core competences. *Arthritis Res Ther* 2016;18:213.
  - 7 Beyer C, Ramiro S, Sivera F *et al.* Educational needs and preferences of young European clinicians and physician researchers working in the field of rheumatology. *RMD Open* 2016;2:e000240.
  - 8 Nikiphorou E, Studenic P, Ammitzbøll CG *et al.* Social media use among young rheumatologists and basic scientists: results of an international survey by the Emerging EULAR Network (EMEUNET). *Ann Rheum Dis* 2016. [annrheumdis-2016-209718](https://doi.org/10.1136/annrheumdis-2016-209718). doi: 10.1136/annrheumdis-2016-209718. [Epub ahead of print].