Background

SpA describes a group of inflammatory arthritic diseases that attack the spine and sacroiliac joints, and in some people, the joints of the arms and legs, among other areas. It can also involve the skin (psoriasis), gut (Crohn’s/ ulcerative colitis) and eyes (uveitis/iritis). These comorbidities (additional conditions), as well as others, in addition to the main SpA symptom of back pain, greatly compound to negatively affect a patient’s quality of life. Many patients have questions about these comorbidities and are unsure of where to go for help.

Objectives

To determine what comorbidities, and how many, SpA patients experience in addition to their diagnosed SpA condition to help identify how the Canadian Spondylitis Association (CSA)** can work with other patient organizations to better raise awareness, educate and provide support to this patient community on the conditions, symptoms and importance of early diagnosis and treatment.

Methods

The CSA membership was surveyed from February through to June 2018. Respondents were asked a variety of questions to gain insights on the comorbidities they experience and live with. After analysing the results, identifying themes and setting priorities, we have initiated collaborative partnerships with patient organizations representing these conditions. Partnerships will involve the exchange of reliable disease-specific information/support.

Results

The most common comorbidities respondents reported included: chronic pain, mental health (depression & anxiety), gut (Crohn’s & ulcerative colitis), eye inflammation (uveitis/iritis), sleep issues and chronic fatigue. Interestingly, these results are different from other studies where osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease were most commonly experienced. In addition to the more prevalent comorbidities, a significant number of people experienced skin (psoriasis), fibromyalgia, hypertension and lung disease.

Conclusions

A significant number of patients diagnosed with a SpA condition experience comorbidities and often have more than one condition. On average, people live with 4 different comorbidities. The survey results have confirmed the significance depression and anxiety impacts patients with SpA.

Managing symptoms sooner can contribute to quicker recovery and/or reduce damage. The Canadian Spondylitis Association, with due diligence, will form a collaborative agreement by leveraging existing partnerships and creating new partnerships with Canadian organizations to support and educate people with credible and valuable Canadian resources on the majority of comorbidities identified through this survey. To date we have confirmed partnerships with Heart & Stroke, Crohn’s & Colitis Canada and Canadian Association of Psoriasis Patients. For those few conditions where Canadian support groups don’t currently exist, we will work with Canadian professional healthcare associations, for example, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, and/or international groups to provide information and resources to our community.

Together we are stronger.

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* Spondyloarthritides include: Ankylosing Spondylitis, Psoriatic Arthritis, Reactive Arthritis, Enteropathic Arthritis (both axial and peripheral disease)

** CSA President: Paul Major, President, Canadian Osteoporosis Network. CSA was founded in 2005. The Canadian Spondylitis Association (CSA) is a national non-profit patient organization supporting patients affected by spondyloarthritis (SpA) and advocating for those living with spondyloarthritis (SpA).

† Respondent Total Mental Health 189: Depression 134 / Anxiety 154. Several overlap

‡ Respondent Total Gut 123: Crohn’s 40 / UC 30 / IBD 53

* The Canadian Spondylitis Association (CSA) is a national non-profit patient organization supporting patients affected by spondyloarthritis (SpA) and advocating for those living with spondyloarthritis (SpA).