



Research Directions

Office of Research Services

Depression and Rheumatoid Arthritis

Dr Tanya Covic the School of Psychology is collaborating with Associate Professor Nick Manolios from the Western Sydney Area Health Service and Dr Steven Cumming from the University of Sydney to explore the link between depression and Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) through an Arthritis NSW Scholarship Research Grant.



'Rheumatoid Arthritis is the second most common form of arthritis and accounts for a national disability burden second only to depression' says Dr Covic. 'It is associated with physical disability, loss of function, poor mental health and premature death. Depression is commonly seen in RA patients, with prevalence ranging from 13-20% based on clinical assessments and as high as 40% based on self-reporting. These depression rates are much higher than in the general population, and they are of significant concern due to the impact of depression of the overall experience of RA.'

Dr Covic says that: 'Depression may influence the patient's ability to cope with their physical symptoms, lead to more negative beliefs about their illness, causing them to view their condition as more serious and to feel less satisfied with treatment outcomes. Early detection is important, however, lack of appropriate training of rheumatology clinicians and clinically impractical assessment tools may be jeopardising disease management strategies for RA sufferers.'

Working closely with Arthritis NSW and rheumatology clinics in Western Sydney, the research team will survey people with RA to determine the presence of depression indicators and associated psychological and physical features. Some RA sufferers will also be interviewed in order to get a one-on-one clinical assessment of their mental health. The findings of this study will contribute to the development of a depression item bank and a depression screening tool specifically for people with RA and suitable for a clinical setting application.

This research will encourage evidence-based clinical detection of depression in RA as part of an overall disease management plan, and will therefore contribute to improving the physical and psychological lives of people with RA all over Australia.

Project Title: Psychosocial wellbeing in Rheumatoid Arthritis: A development of a depression screening tool for a clinical setting application

Funding has been set at: \$27,500

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