

Press Release

The psychological impact of arthritis: the effects of illness perception and coping

Thousands of people across Ireland live with the daily challenge of coping with rheumatoid arthritis. A recent study led by Dr Yulia Zyrianova, Senior Registrar in Psychiatry, examined the psychological impact of arthritis on patients.

- Not all patients respond to arthritis and its treatment in the same way. Individual preconceptions often affect how people seek help, whether or not they follow recommended treatment, and the overall outcome.
- *These preconceptions are rarely explored.*
- The psychiatric impact of arthritis is affected by patients' individual perceptions of their physical illness, and their coping style.
- This recent study jointly by psychiatrists and rheumatologists (based at Cork University Hospital and the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin) examined the relationship between coping strategies and perception of illness in 68 adults with rheumatoid arthritis.
- *In the study, an active coping style (making a personal effort to overcome an illness) was strongly associated with reduced rates of not only depression and anxiety, but also pain.*
- Encouragingly, the authors found a strong link between the level of social support perceived by patients, and a good coping style.
- The authors conclude that patients with rheumatoid arthritis who are under greater perceived stress and use passive coping strategies appear to be at greater risk of mental illness.
- *The authors suggest that such individuals may benefit from psychological supports that (a) target both pain and mood and (b) provide specific active coping strategies.*

ENDS

The original article by Zyrianova Y, Kelly BD, Sheehan J, McCarthy C, Dinan TG can be found in the July 2010 edition of the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* (PMID: 20676797).