
A systematic comparison between rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis: an introduction

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The 2009 Annual Supplement for *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, concerning Contemporary Topics in Rheumatic Diseases, addresses the important topic of similarities and differences between rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and ankylosing spondylitis (AS). In the first half of the 20th century, as recently as three decades ago, these two rheumatic diseases were generally regarded as different manifestations of the same disease entity. Recognition that the two were distinct entities was not definitively established until the 1970s, when immunogenetic markers helped clarify that RA and AS differed in their pathophysiology, clinical manifestations, sex distribution, and other disease features. Nonetheless, patients with RA, AS, and all rheumatic diseases generally are affected by musculoskeletal pain, limitations of functional status, high levels of comorbidities, frequent work disability levels, and increased mortality rates.

Analyses of similarities and differences in RA and AS can be informative to better to understand pathophysiology, clinical features, course, treatments and outcomes of each disease. Furthermore, description of similarities and differences can serve as a model to identify further “subsets” of RA as distinct clinical entities, may guide health professionals toward improved diagnosis, management, and long-term patient outcomes. We have assembled a stellar international panel of authors to address the similarities and differences of RA and AS. The first chapter, a history, reviews the evolution of AS from being viewed as a subset of RA to a separate type of disease entity in pathophysiology and disease manifestations.

The section on pathophysiology includes essays on pathophysiology; pathology; genetics; immunology; and mechanisms of inflammation and repair.

The section concerning clinical features

includes epidemiology, clinical picture, enthesal involvement, extraarticular involvement, and osteoporosis in AS and RA.

The section concerning diagnosis, assessment and outcomes includes diagnosis and classification; early arthritis/back pain clinics; clinical measures; functional outcomes; International Classification of Function, Disability and Health (ICF); structural outcomes; quality of life; socioeconomic considerations; cardiovascular comorbidity; mortality; juvenile forms; and late-onset disease.

A section on therapies includes a general overview; nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs); glucocorticoids; disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs); biological agents; and physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

The Editors are very grateful to all the authors for their expertise and extensive efforts to collate complex material into coherently informative essays. Most of these essays have been written by the leading experts in their respective areas, based on their knowledge of the literature and experience. We found all the essays most interesting and informative, and anticipate that most readers will enjoy similar responses.

The 2009 Annual Supplement for *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, concerning Contemporary Topics in Rheumatic Diseases, addresses the important topic of similarities and differences between rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and ankylosing spondylitis (AS). This is the 10th volume in this series. Previous issues have included:

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Volume 18 (2000) – *Bone mass in the rheumatic diseases*

Volume 19 (2001) – *Controversies in COX-2 inhibitor therapy*

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All previous supplements in this series are available at the website of *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, free of charge: <http://www.clinexprheumatol.org>. Continuing medical education (CME) credit is also available – see that section.

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extensive and excellent work on these chapters. We hope you find this volume, and the series in general, instructive and helpful toward better knowledge and patient care, with improved outcomes for all people with all rheumatic diseases.