

STUDY OF ARTHRITIS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Arthritis Study Update

Fall 2007

This newsletter provides regular updates on the Study of Arthritis in Your Community and related topics. It is provided to past and present study participants as well as individuals who have expressed an interest in our research.

What would you like to see our research focus on next?

Mid-October 2007 marks the beginning of the last round of interviews for the current phase of the *Study of Arthritis in Your Community*. We have lots of ideas as to what research is still needed and are excited about exploring new directions.

As always, we are interested in your thoughts about what type of questions we should be asking during the next phase of the research. We are listening.

If you have a question or idea that you would like us to consider please call us at **(416) 323 – 6218** or **Toll- Free: 1 (877) 437-1591** or write to us at:

Study of Arthritis in Your Community
Women's College Hospital
76 Grenville Street – 8 East
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1B2

Our study interviewer, Shirley Griffin, will also be asking you for your opinion and any suggestions you may have when she calls you for the next interview. We look forward to hearing more from you about what is important to people living with arthritis.

New Medication Review Service Now Available from Ontario Pharmacists: MEDS CHECK



This past summer, we asked study participants to provide us with a list of the medications and over-the-counter products they were using. The response to this request was tremendous.

We appreciate you taking the time to provide us with a copy of your medication lists. This information will allow us to examine patterns of medication use among people living with osteoarthritis.

Since so many of you are taking multiple medications, we thought that you might like to know about a new program offered by Ontario pharmacists. In July 2007, the MEDS CHECK program was launched. (You may have seen the advertisements on television over the past few months.)

MEDS CHECK is a one-on-one, 30 minute appointment with your pharmacist to allow you to:

- Review each of the medications you are taking
- Ensure that you are taking your medications as directed by your doctor
- Help you to understand drug names, strengths, adverse effects and usage instructions
- Learn how prescription, over-the-counter and alternative medications may be affecting each other

- Obtain an accurate and complete personal medication list
- Ask any questions or discuss any concerns you have

This service is available to all Ontarians who are currently taking three or more prescription medications for a chronic condition. If you have an OHIP card, you are eligible for this new free service from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

MEDS CHECK is a voluntary service. Call your local pharmacy and ask to make an appointment with your pharmacist, or speak to your pharmacist the next time you are at the drugstore. You can have a *MEDS CHECK* appointment once a year.

Speaking with your pharmacist is an excellent way to ensure that your medications will be as effective as possible. It will give you the confidence of knowing that you are getting the most out of your prescriptions.

For more information:

MEDS CHECK INFOline

1-866-255-6701 or TTY 1-800-387-5559

Website: www.medscheck.ca

ARTHRITIS Q & A

In each issue, we will try to address your arthritis or study related questions. If you have a question that you would like answered, please let us know.

What are the objectives of The Study of Arthritis in Your Community?

The *Study of Arthritis in Your Community* received additional funding in 2004 to explore the experiences of pain and fatigue among people living with osteoarthritis (OA). The ultimate goal is to develop and test interventions or treatments based on what we have learned that will make your lives, and the lives of others like you, better! We continue to interview study participants twice

a year about many different aspects of their lives.

The research team at the Canadian Osteoarthritis Research Program strongly believe that in order to understand the impact of living with OA, we can't just think about pain and disability. Living with arthritis is much more complex than that. That's why we have been asking you questions about not only your pain and physical function but also about your mood, sleep and quality of life. We believe that it is important to consider these factors, as well as taking into account the impact living with arthritis has had on your social life, relationships, recreational activities and day-to-day activities.

We have many important questions about the relationship between pain, fatigue, mood and sleep. For example, how does living with pain influence one's mood and mental health? Do people with poor sleep quality suffer greater pain and fatigue? Is there a connection between different coping strategies and the way that people experience pain? Does pain have a different impact on quality of life depending on one's age or gender? Is health care use higher among people living with greater pain or is difficulty doing day-to-day activities what drives someone to the doctor's office for help? The *Study of Arthritis in Your Community* is answering these questions with the information that you have shared with us.

As a result of this research, we learned that our current tools for assessing OA pain are inadequate – they fail to capture the things you find most distressing about living with OA pain. This has led to the development of a new OA pain measure, which is now being used both in clinical practice and clinical research to provide a better measure of how well our treatments work. Our research has also documented significant under-use of pain therapies among people living with chronically painful OA – to some extent, this is linked to mis-information about the risks, benefits, and availability of different drug and non-drug

treatments for OA pain. Together with the University of Ottawa, we are now developing a decision aid to help raise awareness of the spectrum of pain therapies available, and their relative risks and benefits, so that patients can make informed choices with their health care providers.

What else is being done with the information that I provide during the study interviews?

The current phase of the research is three years long; which means that we typically wait until the end of the third year before we start analyzing the data. However, we have been so excited about the information that you have given us that we have done some analyses earlier than planned. We have shared results from the *Study of Arthritis in Your Community* to various audiences including clinicians, researchers, consumers, patients and government representatives through the use of presentations, publications and newsletters.

One of the areas that we have looked at, so far, is fatigue and how it relates to OA. Using data from the *Study of Arthritis in Your Community*, we've learned that living with OA pain can "wear you out" and leave you feeling tired and depressed. We've also noticed that some people living with OA report fatigue levels that are similar to the levels of fatigue reported by people living with cancer. Denise Power, a graduate student at the University of Toronto, is working with us to look in more detail at how fatigue, mood and disability are related to each other using data collected during our telephone interviews. With a better understanding of how these factors are related to fatigue, we hope to be able to provide better tools for the diagnosis and treatment of this common condition.

We've also heard that OA pain can make it difficult to get a decent night's sleep and that a poor night's sleep can make it more difficult to deal with pain the next day. In response to this, we have submitted an application to the

Canadian Institutes of Health Research (the same federal agency that currently funds the *Study of Arthritis in Your Community*) to ask for financial resources to examine the extent to which fatigue and pain in OA are exacerbated by underlying, undiagnosed sleep problems. To do this, we will use overnight sleep studies. Since most sleep disturbances can be successfully treated, if we find that sleep problems make pain and fatigue worse for people living with OA, then we can target treatment of these sleep problems as a possible way to reduce OA pain and fatigue.

We are looking forward to doing more analysis of the data that has been shared with us. Detailed analysis will begin in the spring of 2008 and we will share more results with you later next year.

Upcoming Research Project In Osteoarthritis Pain

In the last study newsletter, we briefly introduced Dr Jackie Hochman. Dr. Hochman is a rheumatologist who joined our research team in 2006 and is currently completing a Masters degree in Clinical Epidemiology.

The purpose of Dr. Hochman's research is to study the link between OA pain and the nervous system. Traditionally, OA pain has been thought to be related to tissue damage in the affected joint. However, recent studies suggest that chronic pain in OA may be due not only to damage in the affected joint but perhaps to problems in nerve pathways that transmit pain sensations, called neuropathic pain. As effective medications exist for the treatment of neuropathic pain, the identification of this type of pain in patients



with OA may lead to new treatment options for OA pain.

In the next month, selected participants in the *Study of Arthritis in Your Community* will be mailed a questionnaire. This questionnaire will ask about the different types of knee pain sensations experienced by people living with OA. This information will help Dr. Hochman to better understand the types of pain that are experienced by people living with OA.

If you are interested in learning more about this project, please contact the study office at (416) 323-6218 and we would be happy to provide you with more details.

A New Way to Find Services in Your Community: Dial 2-1-1

Have you ever wondered what community services are available in your area but didn't know where to look? **2-1-1** is a toll free phone number providing access to information about the full range of non-emergency community, social, health and government services. Trained information and referral specialists link callers to the best available information and services including information on senior services, home support, and services that address health needs.

Service Highlights

- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year
- Free of charge, just dial 211 from your phone
- Multi-lingual access
- Confidential

- Comprehensive, professionally maintained database of services and programs

Unfortunately, 211 service is not yet available in all areas. This service is currently accessible in Halton Region, Niagara Region, South Georgian Bay and Toronto and will be rolled out across the country as local, regional and provincial agencies are ready.

Making Exercise Part of Your Life

Exercise is meant to be a healthy habit, like brushing your teeth. Everyone has their own way of approaching exercise. Choose activities that you enjoy in settings you enjoy whether they be indoor or outdoor, winter or summer, alone or in a group.

How much should you exercise? When it comes to exercise, more is not necessarily better. 'Slow and steady, consistently, without fail' should be your motto. Part of your routine would ideally include setting aside a few minutes every day in the morning and before bed for range-of-motion and flexibility exercises. Try doing some range-of-motion exercises while sitting reading a book, listening to music or watching TV.

To learn more about specific range-of-motion, stretching and strengthening exercises for all your body's major joints, be sure to visit The Arthritis Society at www.arthritis.ca and click on '*Tips for Living Well*' to select more joint exercises for arthritis. As with any other changes that may affect your health, we recommended that you speak with your doctor or health care professional before starting any new exercise routine.

TO REACH US:

Study of Arthritis In Your Community

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