ABOUT ARTHRITIS

• Arthritis refers to joint inflammation from a number of causes. The term is used to describe more than 100 rheumatic diseases and conditions that affect joints, the tissues that surround the joint, and other connective tissue.

• Typically, pain and stiffness in and around one of the joints characterize rheumatic conditions. The symptoms can develop gradually or suddenly. Certain rheumatic conditions can also involve the immune system and various internal organs of the body.

• Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, is the most common form of arthritis, affecting up to 27 million Americans.

• Rheumatoid arthritis affects about 1.3 million Americans. In this disease, the body’s immune system attacks its own joint tissue, causing inflammation. It can result in the destruction of cartilage and bone.

VA RESEARCH ON ARTHRITIS: OVERVIEW

• VA researchers are developing new clinical treatments that reduce Veterans’ disabilities and improve the ability of VA clinicians to provide effective care for patients with arthritis.

• Some groups are identifying molecular mechanisms that affect skeletal health and can lead to new treatments for osteoarthritis. Others are using innovative techniques to design therapeutic interventions, from surgical techniques to physical therapy, for patients who have lost mobility or functioning. Still others hope to halt the progression of osteoarthritis, and to reverse the degeneration of cartilage associated with the disease.

• VA studies are exploring less expensive drug treatments for arthritis. Others are examining possible causes of arthritis, such as immune system changes and a possible link to PTSD.

• VA researchers are exploring complementary and integrative treatments, including nutritional supplements, massage, and activity pacing, to manage pain caused by arthritis.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2002 – Established the Rheumatoid Arthritis Registry, providing researchers with access to information about hundreds of male patients with rheumatoid arthritis

2006 – Found little overall benefit in two widely used nutritional supplements for arthritis (glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate)

2011 – Learned that the complement system, a group of proteins that move freely through the blood stream, plays an important role in the development and spread of osteoarthritis

2014 – Received the Lee C. Howley Sr. Prize for Arthritis Scientific Research (VA Boston Health Care System and others) for determining that less expensive anti-rheumatic drugs worked as well as newer, more expensive, biological treatments

2014 – Tested an anti-inflammatory drug on mice that may someday have the effect of reversing bone loss in patients with RA

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

• Group and individual physical therapy are equally effective for patients with knee osteoarthritis, found a study conducted at the Durham VA Medical Center in North Carolina. The researchers say both approaches are reasonable

(Continued on back)
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