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Media Release

Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases at the RUH backs national arthritis awareness campaign

The Rheumatology team at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases at the RUH is backing a national campaign to raise awareness of a rare form of inflammatory arthritis.

Nine out of ten people (91%) have never heard of Axial Spondyloarthritis (axial SpA) despite one in 200 people in the UK living with the condition, according to the National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society (NASS).

It has launched a campaign, Act On Axial SpA, to increase public awareness and to challenge what it says is an unacceptable eight-year delay to diagnosis.

RUH Consultant Rheumatologist Dr Raj Sengupta said: "Axial SpA is a progressive and painful form of inflammatory arthritis that starts when people are young, in their mid-teens to late 20s.

"It's really important that anyone under the age of 45 and living with persistent inflammatory back pain sees their GP to check whether they could have axial SpA. Early treatment is vital too to prevent more serious and irreversible damage.

"The good news is that with the right treatment and care, people can live very well with axial SpA. Our advice is to be aware, recognise the signs and see your GP without delay."

Anyone concerned they may have axial SpA can visit actonaxialspa.com and use the symptom checker. More information is available on the NASS website [here](#)

The awareness campaign comes shortly after a new drug injection, secukinumab, was approved for use by the NHS to help those in the early stages of spondyloarthritis.

Dr Sengupta said: "The hope is that if we can get the treatment to the right patients earlier, the response rate will be better and we'll have more chance of slowing down irreversible spine damage."

The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases at the RUH has a long history in the management of axial SpA and is internationally renowned for being at the forefront of care and research into the condition. The hospital sees approximately 2000 patients a year with axial SpA, around 30% of whom come from regions outside the hospitals catchment area.

Because of COVID-19 social distancing restrictions it has recently introduced a virtual self-management programme that has been well-received by patients.

The five-day course includes educational talks, exercise and stretching sessions with input from specialists including physiotherapists, psychologists and the lead consultation team.

For more information see the website [here](#)

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Notes to Editor:

The Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust provides acute treatment and care for a catchment population of around 500,000 people in Bath, and the surrounding towns and villages in North East Somerset and Western Wiltshire. The hospital provides healthcare to the population served by four Clinical Commissioning Groups: Bath & North East Somerset CCG, Wiltshire CCG, Somerset CCG and South Gloucestershire CCG.

The Trust provides 759 beds and a comprehensive range of acute services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

In 2015 The Royal United Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust acquired the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (RNHRD) NHS Foundation Trust. The RNHRD treats patients from across the country offering services in rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME, cancer related fatigue and fatigue linked to other long term conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

The RUH is changing - we have an exciting programme of redevelopment underway transforming our site and further improving the services we provide. The Trust has opened the purpose-built RNHRD and Brownsword Therapies Centre and is now working towards the new Dyson Cancer Centre. For more details visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk/about/fit_for_the_future

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk