Influence of rheumatoid arthritis on employment

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Aims: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is the most common chronic inflammatory rheumatic disease causing progressive joint destruction with an important functional, social, psychological and vocational impairment. The aim of our study was to evaluate the professional impact of the disease on the affected subject's and to assess their quality of life.

Method: We have conducted an exhaustive retrospective study of 50 patients with RA diagnosed in the Rheumatology Service of University Hospital of Monastir in Tunisia between 1999 and 2013 according to the ACR1987 and EULAR 2010 criteria.

Results: Work stoppage and capacity of work of one hand and the quality of life on the other were respectively measured by the WHO-HPQ, the WAI and HAQ. Half of our patients stopped definitively their professional activity because of their illness. It occurred at 5 years of evolution of the disease in the majority of cases. The working abandonment was found in 48% of the cases, invalidity in 28% of the cases and the long-term sick leave in 12% of the cases. Absence from work was observed in 84%, it was estimated at 38 hours a month. Using the WHO-HPQ, the average relative absenteeism during the last 4 weeks was 20% and the average relative presenteeism was 70%. Predictors of work stoppages were the means of transport between the place of residence and workplace, the work sector, the professional category, the ESR and the presence of hip disease. The patients in professional activity had a mean score of WAI to 28, 80% of them had a working capacity poor to moderate. The predictive factors of poor work ability were the type of profession, the exposure to movements in hyper flexion, hyperextension of wrists and to repetitive gestures, a high rate of absenteeism, a low rate of presenteeism and a high HAQ score.

Conclusion: Job loss is a multi-factorial phenomenon. It seems that age, education, physical and psychosocial constraints, HAQ score and the type of treatment are the most important determinants of work stoppage.

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