

EULAR 2021 Report

By Philip A. Baer, MDCM, FRCPC, FACR



After a full pandemic year, EULAR returned for 2021 again as a virtual e-Congress, instead of occurring physically in Paris. The platform was noticeably improved from 2020, when the conversion from a live to a virtual congress occurred suddenly and unexpectedly. I found the platform stable, with excellent audio and video, even when thousands of participants attended a live session. Navigating between posters was sometimes difficult, and while some posters could be downloaded via QR codes, many others could not. PDFs of the slides for invited lectures would also be an excellent addition for future virtual congresses.

Being based in North America meant some early mornings, but the live events compensated by ending in the early afternoon, with most available for ad hoc playback thereafter. A full roster of events catered to allied health professionals, pediatric rheumatologists, and patients with rheumatic diseases. While I did not find the industry exhibits, there was a full roster of industry-sponsored symposia running in parallel. There were also EULAR trivia games based on knowledge and speed of responses. I tried one and placed seventh, which unexpectedly provided a prize of a EULAR textbook.

I found many presentations focused on safety, though there were no updates on the ORAL Surveillance study which made news earlier in the year. Integrated safety studies on janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors were prominent, as was another instalment of the JAKPOT multi-country registry study, also focused on JAK safety. There were many abstracts on the flavours du jour: COVID-19 and virtual medicine. New GRAPPA recommendations on psoriatic arthritis (PsA) therapy were welcome, now including eight domains. The PsA arena continues to feature novel therapies, from more IL-17 and IL-23 inhibitors to the first of the tyrosine kinase (TYK) inhibitors, deucravacitinib.

One hopes the brand name will be easier to pronounce. Axial disease in PsA remains an area of interest regarding both definition and response to therapy, and differences from axial spondyloarthritis (SpA).

Lupus advances were also in the news, including the focus on LLDAS (lupus low disease activity state) as a target for those who cannot reach remission. Further details of studies of belimumab and voclosporin in lupus nephritis were presented.

In rheumatoid arthritis (RA), foci included biosimilars, cardiovascular disease, and comorbidities, including fatigue and mood disorders. Difficult-to-treat RA is another trending topic. Presentations on gout, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis rounded out the usual suspects.

Weird science candidates included a negative study on fecal microbiota transplantation as a treatment for psoriatic arthritis (OP0010, also mentioned in the closing clinical highlights session), and a study on the benefits of Argentinean tango practice for patients with inflammatory rheumatic diseases (POS1475-HPR). Oddly, that study was conducted in France!

Another oddity: slides showing a red camera icon (don't photograph) or a green camera icon (OK to photograph). Those red icons were often ignored in the days of live meetings; with the ease of taking screenshots while on any virtual platform, they seem pointless.

For those who prefer summaries of current practice, there were a series of WIN (What Is New) and HOT (How To Treat) lectures spanning the gamut of rheumatology topics, delivered by experts on the various topics.

Despite the lack of Parisian tourist attractions, French food, and in-person interactions, and perhaps because jet lag was not an issue, EULAR 2021 was a winning event. The hope is that in-person EULAR meetings will resume in June 2022 at the Bella Centre in Copenhagen, though a virtual component is likely here to stay.

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