

PRESS RELEASE

A new study on Global Burden of Disease data for England highlights “a huge opportunity for preventive public health”, but musculoskeletal disorders remain under-prioritised compared to their enormous and growing burden, says the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance.

The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) data published in 2013 highlighted that one of the main challenges for “developed” countries such as the UK is a growing burden of disability, owing to more people living longer with more long-term conditions - with musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders the single biggest cause.

Today, new evidence applied specifically to England and published in *The Lancet* underscores this continuing trend, and once again highlights how more needs to be done to tackle conditions like MSK disorders through integrated models of care and a much more preventive approach.

MSK disorders affect around ten million people across the UK and account for the fourth largest NHS programme budget spend of £5 billion in England¹. We now know that they account for the biggest part of the workload of the health service, 40% of which is due to potentially preventable risk factors. Low back and neck pain in particular emerges at the very top of the list of conditions with the highest DALY, i.e. Years of Life Lost (YLL) combined with Years Lived with Disability (YLD) – ahead of more “life-threatening” conditions such as COPD (4th), lung cancer (5th), and diabetes (11th).

The new findings reveal that “In England, and in other high-income countries, a larger share of DALYs now comes from YLDs, rather than YLLs”, and that “for low-mortality disorders, such as musculoskeletal disease, DALYs tend to be based on incomplete data at subnational level, and the level of inequality for many disorders is likely to be underestimated.”² [emphasis added]

MSK disorders specifically “are a dominant cause of YLDs, and consume a substantial amount of health-system resources”. Because they are also strongly age-related, they “will become increasingly prevalent as the population ages.”³

However, the study’s authors go on to highlight that there is still insufficient strategic prioritisation for conditions like MSK disorders, as “for several disorders, although mortality rates may have reduced, the burden of ill health has either not declined by the same extent or is increasing.”⁴

Prof Anthony Woolf, Chair of the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA) and co-author of the study, said, “The new Global Burden of Disease evidence published in *The Lancet* paints a familiar and compelling picture which requires us to take stock of where resources need to be invested in order to successfully meet the challenges not just of tomorrow, but of today. This means a better understanding of the risk factors behind the growing burden of disability in this country, and a greater emphasis on tackling some of the major causes of this through a more joined-up and preventive approach. MSK disorders in particular must not be an afterthought but must constitute a

¹ Department of Health (February 2014), 2012-13 Programme budgeting benchmarking tool.

² John Newton et al; *Changes in health in England, with analysis by English regions and areas of deprivation, 1990–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013*; *The Lancet*; 15 September 2015

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

central focus for national and local strategies aimed at improving health and well-being across the board.”

Dr. Liam O’Toole, chief executive of charity Arthritis Research UK, said: “Today’s study provides conclusive evidence that for too long, the needs of the millions of people in the UK living with neck, back pain and osteoarthritis have been ignored. This is an issue that will not go away. But there is hope; evidence shows that losing weight and keeping active can reduce the risk of getting arthritis and help to manage the pain caused by arthritis. Ahead of the Spending Review, we urge the Chancellor to commit to maintaining public health spending at current levels and invest more to help people maintain and improve their health.”

Federico Moscogiuri, chief executive of ARMA, added, “This data offers the latest and strongest evidence yet that effectively addressing the growing burden of MSK disorders is where some of the biggest wins lie for healthcare, social care and public health alike. We fully support the study authors’ call for ‘new, more integrated more integrated models of care spanning health and social services that respond to the specific needs and circumstances of individual patients’, and we call on Government and on all commissioners of care in England to prioritise MSK disorders and to take a more preventive approach in addressing them, in line with ARMA’s [Key Messages for Commissioners in England](#).”

Since its launch in 2000, the Bone and Joint Decade – the Global Alliance for MSK Health - has also done much to change priorities at the international level by identifying the effect these conditions have on people and on society. The Bone and Joint Decade is currently championing a [Call for Action](#) by the World Health Organisation, the United Nations, and by national governments and for explicit plans to respond to the Global Burden of Disease evidence and the new ranking which shows that MSK disorders have an enormous and growing impact in all regions of the world. “What we need now is actions by policy-makers to prioritise preventing and treating these conditions to avoid people having unnecessary disability and pain,” Prof Woolf concludes.

ARMA

The Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA) is the umbrella body providing a collective voice for the musculoskeletal community in the UK, comprising patient, professional and research-focused organisations working across the range of musculoskeletal conditions.

ARMA’s **vision** is of an effective, unified musculoskeletal community working together to improve the lives of people with musculoskeletal disorders.

ARMA **mission** is to transform the quality of life of people with musculoskeletal disorders. This is achieved by shaping policy and best practice, in partnership with its member organisations.

For more information please visit arma.uk.net