

Novartis, partners raise awareness on AxSpA, a debilitating spine and joint disease

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- Axial Spondyloarthritis (AxSpA) is a debilitating disease that significantly impacts quality of life. Advances in early diagnosis and treatment of non-radiographic (nr-AxSpA) are crucial to fill unmet needs in managing the disease and improve health outcomes of patients.
- Continuing medical education among clinicians and promoting patient awareness on early detection and novel treatments will prevent disability.

October 29, 2021 – As part of the Bone and Joint Week celebration this October, Novartis announced the renewal of its partnership with Axial Spondyloarthritis Association of the Philippines (ASAPh) and Philippine Rheumatology Association (PRA) to raise awareness on Axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA) early diagnosis and treatment.

AxSpA is an umbrella term that can include non-radiographic axSpA (nr-axSpA), radiographic axSpA known as Ankylosing Spondylitis, as well as various other kinds of spondyloarthritis conditions.(1) This October, Bone and Joint Week is celebrated to raise awareness on disorders such as arthritis, back pain, trauma, pediatric conditions, osteoporosis and including axSpA. Activities included in this awareness campaign are designed to educate patients, families and the general public about the importance of early diagnosis, prevention, disease management and treatment.

Early Axial Spondyloarthritis diagnosis leads to more meaningful, productive life

Nr-axSpA patients may not have any inflammation visible on x-ray or MRI despite symptoms of back pain. Some may never go on to develop visible inflammation on MRI. This can lead to delay in diagnosis. Diagnosis delay refers to the interval between the appearance of symptoms of axSpA and the diagnosis, which is usually made by a rheumatologist but may be made by another health care provider. Globally, the delay in diagnosis averages about seven years. (2)

Early consultation is key to addressing axSpA. Some of the early signs and symptoms of axSpA include frequent back pains caused by inflammation in the spine, but can also affect other joints, tendons and ligaments, persistence of pain lasting for months as opposed to pain coming on in short attacks, weight loss, fatigue or tiredness, feeling feverish and night sweats.(3)

“Raising awareness to this underserved group of patients who have non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis , continuing advances in education among clinicians and empowering the patients themselves, we have the chance to prevent disability,” explained Dr. Evan Glenn Vista, FPCP, FPRA, Rheumatologist. “By intervening early and holistically, these individuals would be able to lead a meaningful life, integrate and contribute to our society without the burden of the disease during their most productive years.”

The International Map of Axial Spondyloarthritis (IMAS) survey, the largest global case study, has recently found that many patients experience difficulties in daily living, career choices, and even their mental health if the diagnosis and treatment are delayed. (4)

The good news is that AxSpA is treatable and there are several novel treatments available.

Proper diagnosis and treatment are crucial for better patient outcomes.

“All of us at ASAPh, as well as our families, NGOs, the Philippine Rheumatology Association, and Novartis Philippines, believe that we can achieve our shared purpose, which is to give Filipino AS patients a pain-free life,” said Mr. Clark Ferrer, President, Axial Spondyloarthritis Association of the Philippines.

“The COVID-19 pandemic affected the diagnosis and treatment of our patients. Through this renewed partnership with Novartis, we are hopeful that our patients will have better access to information on the disease and novel treatments for this condition. With our 200-strong rheumatologist members and partners, we at the Philippine Rheumatology Association are one with your mission of providing better health outcomes to our AS patients,” shared Dr. Juan Javier Lichauco, President, Philippine Rheumatology Association.

“Over the years, we have formed a strong relationship with ASAPh and PRA. Having these partnerships allows us to offer healthcare services to those who need them most. We at Novartis support your goal of improving the quality of life of AS patients. Research and development efforts are designed to provide patients with novel medicines and treatments that will let them live pain-free. As partners, we look forward to this strengthened collaboration as well as to providing the support our patients need,” emphasized Jugo Tsumura, President and Managing Director, Novartis.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships between the Axial Spondyloarthritis Association of the PH (ASAPh), Philippine Rheumatology Association (PRA) and Novartis seek to guide patients and raise awareness about AS. A recent ASAPh campaign, dubbed as “Got UR Back”, is an example of an awareness initiative that encourages patients to ‘speak their truth’ about the pain and real-life complications brought about by their axSpA condition. From the importance of learning about this disease, to early diagnosis, to better treatment access to patients here in the Philippines, the campaign promises that stakeholders ‘got patients’ backs’ in that they listen to and plan on acting on the problems that the patients themselves voice out. In connection to this campaign, Filipinos living with axSpA are invited to share their personal experiences with the debilitating disease by participating in the IMAS online patient experience survey. It is a worldwide anonymous survey to give AS patients a chance to be heard.

For more information, visit the ASAPh Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/asaph.org>) to learn more about this campaign for AS patients and take the IMAS survey.



Dr. Evan Glenn Vista, FPCP, FPRA, Rheumatologist



Novartis, ASAPh, PRA renewal of partnership. Clark Ferrer, President, Axial Spondyloarthritis Association of the Philippines, Dr. Juan Javier Lichauco, President, Philippine Rheumatology Association, Jugo Tsumura, President and Managing Director, Novartis

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