



Women's Insights into Rheumatoid Arthritis

The untold story of women with rheumatoid arthritis in Australia

As the stories of rheumatoid arthritis are often untold, the seriousness of the disease is not understood and its prevalence in Australia often underestimated.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the most serious form of arthritis. It is not a rare disease affecting around half a million people. Of these cases almost 60% are women.

While sometimes thought to be a disease affecting the elderly, rheumatoid arthritis can be diagnosed at any age, often in those aged 25-54 years.

Arthritis Australia and the Australian Rheumatology Association have created the Women's Insights into Rheumatoid Arthritis campaign to give a voice to the approximately 300,000 Australian women with rheumatoid arthritis. With the support of healthcare company Abbott, these women have had a chance to share their untold, yet powerful stories with female Federal MPs.

The ***Women's Insights into Rheumatoid Arthritis*** book features the stories of 12 incredibly stoic and inspiring Australian women with this debilitating condition—as shared with their local female Federal MP. It captures the stories of these women who go largely unrecognised in society, despite the many daily hardships they silently endure as a result of their condition.

Too many Australians with rheumatoid arthritis are not being diagnosed and treated quickly enough.

It is hoped that the book provides inspiration for others affected by rheumatoid arthritis to get a proper diagnosis early on, to take control of their health, and to be more open with their family, colleagues and friends so they can help generate greater understanding and support of the condition. The book also aims to help healthcare professionals, as well as policy makers, realise that more needs to be done to provide better care and access to services and treatment.

Rheumatoid arthritis has a huge impact on the individual person both socially and financially. Many people miss out on the available services and treatments because they simply cannot afford them.

In summary it is hoped that the book will help ensure:

- Australians understand the warning symptoms and the importance of consulting their GP immediately
- GPs are up to date with the latest rheumatoid arthritis information and will refer their patients to a rheumatologist for a proper diagnosis and management plan
- Australians take control of their rheumatoid arthritis and actively pursue quality health care and proper support from their family
- Decision makers understand the seriousness of rheumatoid arthritis and support those in need.

Most of all, we want to reassure those living with rheumatoid arthritis that they are not alone.

The book will be distributed to rheumatologists as an educational tool for their RA patients and can be downloaded from the Arthritis Australia website www.arthritisaustralia.com.au. Further copies will be distributed to all public/municipal libraries across Australia.

The 12 Australian women who stepped forward to break the silence and share their story for the ***Women's Insights into Rheumatoid Arthritis*** book are:

- Renee Lang, aged 21, Adelaide, SA as told to the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport, The Hon Kate Ellis MP, Member for Adelaide, SA
- Rebecca Henderson, aged 30, Griffith, NSW as told to the Nationals Chief Whip, Kay Hull MP, Member for Riverina, NSW
- Hayley Foyster, aged 33, Kingscliff, Queensland as told to the Minister for Ageing, The Hon Justine Elliot MP, Member for Richmond, NSW
- Suzie May, aged 35, Perth, WA as told to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Member for Curtin, WA
- Amanda Glynn, aged 39, Perth, WA as told to the Australian Greens Whip, Senator Rachel Siewert, Senator for WA
- Despina Gonis, aged 48, Adelaide, SA as told to the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Senator for SA
- Christine O'Brien, aged 49, Melbourne, Victoria as told to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Member for Heidelberg, Victoria
- Sabine Gunton, aged 54, Sydney, NSW as told to the Shadow Minister for Seniors, The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, Member for Mackellar, NSW
- Ann Goody, aged 56, Cooktown, Queensland as told to Senator Sue Boyce, Senator for Queensland
- Elleke Penny, aged 59, Melbourne, Victoria as told to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Education and Minister for Social Inclusion, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Member for Lalor, Victoria
- Judith Nguyen, aged 63, Sydney, NSW as told to the Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women, The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Member for Sydney, NSW
- Barbara Dutton, aged 74, Burnie, Tasmania as told to Senator Carol Brown, Senator for Tasmania.

References: 1. Arthritis Australia 2008. Rheumatoid Arthritis. http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au/images/stories/documents/info_sheets/english/colour/Rheumatoid%20Arthritis.pdf (Accessed on 14 January 2009) 2. Access Economics Report, Painful Realities: The economic impact of arthritis in Australia in 2007



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