

# Education for people with RMDs and employers can improve ability to work

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The results of an educational programme implemented by the Galician Rheumatology League (LRG), presented today at the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology (EULAR) 2017, showed that providing education and advice to people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease (RMD) and their employers can make a significant difference to the ability to work.

Each [employee](#) with an RMD had 1 session with a psychologist and 1 session with an occupational therapist to identify their individual difficulties in continuing to be active at [work](#). Peer support from the LRG was also key in creating a secure environment for employees, who found relief in seeing other people with RMDs maintain a sustainable work life.

An LRG health professional also gave personalised advice to employers about RMDs, the specific needs of these employees, how to make it easier for them to stay at work, and how to minimise their work difficulties due to their chronic condition.

"Most employers lack information on how RMDs interfere with an employee's ability to work and how best to make the necessary adaptations to not lose this person from their workforce," said lead author Mr. Francisco Javier Carreira Roca from Liga Reumatológica Española (Spanish Rheumatology League), Madrid, Spain. "Our programme has demonstrated that these kinds of actions can increase the number of employees with RMD in work," he explained.

The Eurobarometer states that over one-fifth (22%) of the general population currently has, or has previously experienced long-term muscle, bone and joint problems, such as rheumatism and arthritis.

This means that 10 million people are affected in Spain, and more than 600,000 people in the autonomous region of Galicia where the LRG works.

Around 50% of people with RMDs are currently unemployed because of their condition; only some of them have the legal work incapacity recognised and receive a pension. This means that RMDs not only affect health, but also socio-economic status. Most of these people could stay at work and are willing to do so if some arrangements are made like cutting down hours, work place adaptations, and a flexible schedule.

During 2016, out of 14 employees included in this pilot programme, 5 could stay at work or return to work. "Because of our programme, there was an increase in the employees' self-confidence in their capacity to stay at work, and their awareness about which of their limitations were solvable," Mr. Carreira Roca added.

The key objectives of the LRG programme were:

- To make the employer more aware of the positive aspects of keeping all employees including people with RMDs not just at the work place but at full capacity, to avoid both absenteeism and presenteeism
- To help the employer know more about the specific needs of people with RMDs and the necessary adaptations for each of them
- Keep people with RMDs at work with the best possible conditions for both the employee and the employer, as efficiently as possible

The programme included an occupational therapist who has treated the employee and knows about their needs, going to their work place to view the actual conditions, identify manageable obstacles and talk to the [employer](#). An architect specialised in accessibility then offers specific architectural and ergonomic solutions to make the necessary adaptations to the work place.

Provided by European League Against Rheumatism

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