

Special Call for Research Proposals on COVID-19 in RMDs

Introduction

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) first emerged in Wuhan leading to a cluster of respiratory infections. The disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 (coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19) rapidly spreads worldwide. Patients with Rheumatic Musculoskeletal Diseases (RMDs) may be at particular risk for COVID-19 as they show an intrinsically higher risk for infections. In addition, many of the treatments used for RMDs, such as glucocorticoids or disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs have the potential to increase infection risk. Therefore, a better mechanistic understanding and clinical knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 in RMD patients is urgently needed. The Foundation for Research in Rheumatology is alert to these developments threatening patients with RMDs and therefore organizes an ad hoc research campaign to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on RMD patients. To implement this strategy as fast as possible a Special Call for Research Proposals on COVID-19 in RMDs is launched.

Scope

FOREUM seeks to support projects in the following areas:

- Investigations that provide insights into the clinical course of COVID-19 in patients with RMD compared to non-RMD patients (international registers, cohorts, clinical studies)
- Projects that address diagnostic and therapeutic challenges of SARS-CoV-2 infection in RMD patients
- Research on pathogenic mechanisms (e.g. cytokine release syndrome) in the context of COVID-19

The call is not intended to provide support for building up National Registers for COVID-19 or to fund treatment studies in COVID-19 patients.

Eligibility

FOREUM will be as flexible as possible in this call in order to attract the most promising research concepts that will allow to rapidly improve the situation of RMD patients during this pandemic. Therefore, shorter as well as longer projects and smaller mono-centric as well as larger collaborative projects can be funded. Any given institution shall be allowed to lead on only one application. However, that institution, or its staff may participate in other projects as collaborators. The call shall be open to participants from EULAR membership countries. Also, the Principal Investigator should come from a EULAR membership country. Centers from non- EULAR membership countries can participate as partners in exceptional cases (e.g. specific scientific expertise), but will not be eligible to receive research funding. Members of the FOREUM committees and EULAR Executive Committee are not allowed to submit or to participate in applications.

Budget and duration

The COVID-19 call is designed to fund a range of research projects. We are especially aiming at projects that provide insight in the short-term, while the maximum duration of a project is three years. An individual mono-centric proposal may be funded with up to a maximal amount of 100.000 Euro, while a multi-centric proposal may go up to a maximal amount of 300.000 Euro provided the expenditure is appropriately justified. Budget needs to be well-justified and adapted to the duration of the project and number of participants. Projects with a duration beyond one year will be subjected to an interim

evaluation of progress and all projects will have to offer a written final report. Submitted publications can be used as part of the report.

How to apply

Applications should be submitted electronically to FOREUM (info@foreum.org) by 7 June 2020. Necessary application forms can be downloaded at www.foreum.org. The proposals should not only include information on the study question and its novelty, but also the agreement of the participating centers to collaborate in data analyses or to provide aggregated or raw data in line with national regulations and their governing boards in case of multi-center projects. The application should state how the project process can be expedited (e.g. ensure any ethics approval, contracts) to make sure data are available in time to be useful in the current pandemic. This can be done through letters of commitment from data sources, steering committees, contracts officers, or whomever needed.

A lay summary proposal needs to be added to the application. Please note that the lay summary is a critical part of our evaluation as the views of people with RMDs are central in our decision-making process. The Secretariat will respond by 6 July 2020 whether the proposal will be recommended for funding or will be rejected.

Participation of patient research partners

Participation of patient research partners is strongly recommended for clinical research projects and should be considered for all other research projects to provide experiential knowledge, with the aim of improving the relevance, quality and validity of the research process.

For more information, please read the material on http://www.eular.org/pare_patient_research_partners.cfm

Evaluation and decision

The proposals will then be externally, independently peer-reviewed to evaluate their feasibility, novelty, design, relevance and potential impact relative to the subject matter of the call. Based on this peer review, the FOREUM Scientific Committee will make a funding recommendation to the FOREUM Executive Committee, which will make funding decisions in June 2020. Final decisions will be communicated by the FOREUM Secretariat on 6 July 2020.

Ethical aspects

FOREUM expects a high standard in the conduct of research it funds. For researchers this includes scientific integrity and adherence to the principles of good research practice. Patients subjected to investigation shall be included with due adherence to the declaration of Helsinki. Declaration of Interest forms will be completed by all successful applicants.

Management of the Call

The FOREUM call and approval process will be administered by the FOREUM Secretariat, together with the FOREUM Scientific Committee.

Timeline

Closing date for proposals: 7 June 2020
Decisions on proposals announced: 6 July 2020

Inquiries

For general inquiries please contact the FOREUM Secretariat at info@foreum.org.