The presence of the Brazilian rheumatology in the GRAPPA

Dear Editors,
In order to highlight the Brazilian participation in the GRAPPA meeting, we submit the following letter:

Psoriatic arthritis (PsA) was identified as a specific entity after the studies by Verna Wright in Leeds, United Kingdom. By the late 1950s, Verna already acknowledged that erosive arthritis in the absence of serum rheumatoid factor and in association with intense inflammatory activity was a different clinical condition from rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.[1] A few years later, John Moll, also from Leeds, together with Verna Wright established through a classical publication the classification criteria for PsA, incorporating the five different types of clinical presentation of the disease.[2] It is worth emphasizing that Verna Wright created the Unit of Rheumatology of Leeds in 1964, which concentrated the studies on PsA. In 1980, he was the leading figure of the Brazilian Congress of Rheumatology in Belo Horizonte, invited by Professor Paulo Madureira, and, in 1988, Verna Wright died.

Along with the evolution of epidemiological and physiopathological knowledge, the concept of "psoriatic disease" as a systemic inflammatory condition has grown, characterized by clinical manifestations involving different organs and associated with specific comorbidities, such as diabetes mellitus and hypertension. Thus, considering the need to increase the interaction between specialists and the understanding about PsA from the rheumatological and dermatological viewpoints, multidisciplinary meetings became a reality and stimulated the creation of the Group for Research and Assessment of Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis (GRAPPA) in 2003.[3]

The group is an international non-profit organization with educational and scientific purposes. It promotes cooperation between several medical disciplines, and currently consists of about 320 prominent researchers and opinion leaders among rheumatologists, dermatologists, radiologists, geneticists, epidemiologists, and representatives from patient service leagues and from the biopharmaceutical industry. Approximately 60% of its participants live and work outside North America. The first official GRAPPA meeting was held in New York in August 2003, when initial research priorities were established. To achieve its objectives and goals, GRAPPA has created the following committees responsible for distinct and relevant areas to the management of patients with psoriasis (PsO) and PsA: Peripheral Joint Assessment; Spinal Assessment; Publications; Imaging; Website; Quality of Life/Function/Participation; Governance; Histology/Immunohistochemistry; and Treatment Guidelines. The identification of adequate biomarkers and clinical instruments to assess patients with PsA, validated for clinical practice and for clinical studies, is fundamental and mandatory. Predictive biomarkers of articular involvement in patients with PsO and of articular damage in PsA are being jointly developed by GRAPPA and the Outcome Measures in Rheumatology Clinical Trials (OMERACT). In addition, specific instruments for diagnosis, follow-up, and treatment, essential in approaching patients with "psoriatic disease", are also being developed.

The accomplishments of GRAPPA were as follows: publications; evidence-based reviews; prioritized domains of inquiry within PsA and PsO research through consensus process finalized at OMERACT; intranet launch, which provides a way to communicate and post documents; international dermatology and rheumatology meetings; and annual meetings at various countries. Research projects with international collaboration are being developed, focusing on: refinement and validation of arthritis outcome measures in PsA; development of instruments to assess quality of life, function, and participation; standardization of histologic and immunohistochemistry assessments of skin and synovial membrane; updated criteria for classification of PsA (CASPAR); imaging in PsA; socioeconomic impact and effect of therapy; production of a video/web-based assessment training; and response measure project.

The GRAPPA's goals are as follows: provide a forum for networking and communication between its members, industry, patient service leagues and regulatory agencies; provide the opportunity for in-person meetings and an intranet communication to share knowledge, research findings, and develop or conduct collaborative research, education, and other projects; develop and validate criteria for the definition of PsA; review, develop and validate effective and feasible outcome measures for the assessment of PsA and PsO; promote the development of registries of patients; work closely with representatives of patients to promote public education and awareness of PsA and PsO; work closely with representatives of pharmaceutical companies to promote and conduct research on effective therapies for PsA and PsO; work closely with representatives of regulatory agencies to establish appropriate guidelines for approval of new therapies; work with other professional bodies, such as the American College of Rheumatology, American Academy of Dermatology, and OMERACT, to promote knowledge of research about PsA and PsO within the context of the respective disciplines; and to develop treatment guidelines for governmental and other interested parties.

In fact, in recent years, GRAPPA has made an extraordinary effort to foster educational and scientific meetings, which facilitate the development and dissemination of information related to PsO and PsA among different medical specialists who work in these areas, such as rheumatologists and dermatologists. Thus, enhancement in research, diagnosis, follow-up, and treatment of PsO and PsA has been achieved. Recently, in September 2010, thanks to the efforts of the Brazilian GRAPPA members and the high receptivity of the Brazilian Society of Rheumatology, it was possible to hold the first GRAPPA meeting in Latin America (GRAPPA CBR 2010) during the XXVIII Brazilian Congress of Rheumatology, in the city of Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. This first GRAPPA meeting in Latin America gathered several Brazilian participants, in addition to ten invited foreign speakers. Since that event, a Brazilian harmonious and recognized group has been formed inside GRAPPA, and already participates in some of the ongoing projects. Currently this group is defining goals for the future, which allow its more active participation inside GRAPPA, well aligned with the Spondyloarthritis Committee of the Brazilian Society of Rheumatology.

These events and joint studies gathering rheumatologists, other specialists, and professionals willing to contribute to knowledge about PsO and PsA have been aimed at providing scientific evidence for advances in clinical and therapeutic management, enabling the enhancement of the quality of life and prognosis of patients with PsA. Thus, systematic joint meetings should strengthen the presence of the Brazilian rheumatology in GRAPPA worldwide, which currently comprises three dermatologists (Flávia Lisboa, Marcia Ramos-e-Silva, and Cid Sabbag) and eight rheumatologists (Roberto Acayaba de Toledo and the seven authors of this letter). As members, we participate in several annual meetings and are encouraged to take part in projects and specific committees.

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