

January 12, 2015

Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality
540 Gaither Road, Suite 2000
Rockville, MD 20850.

Re: Systematic Review for Effectiveness of Hyaluronic Acid in the Treatment of Severe Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) of the Knee Pain

On behalf of the more than 50 million adults and children living with arthritis in the United States, the Arthritis Foundation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft manuscript "*Systematic Review for Effectiveness of Hyaluronic Acid in the Treatment of Severe Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) of the Knee.*"

Over 700,000 total knee replacements are performed annually in the United States, primarily for arthritis, and this number is increasing. Osteoarthritis, the most common form of chronic arthritis, affects 10 to 20% of persons age 60 and over. Osteoarthritis of the knee is twice as common as osteoarthritis of the hip. With the aging of the general population combined with the growing prevalence of the disease, and the enormous physical, emotional, and financial impact arthritis has on patients and their families, osteoarthritis of the knee is becoming an increasingly important condition to diagnose and treat early using all available and new diagnostic and treatment options.

In a very recent systematic review and network meta-analysis on the effectiveness of various pharmacologic interventions for knee osteoarthritis, which was based on 137 studies comprising 33,243 participants, investigators concluded that intra-articular treatments including hyaluronic acid showed clinically significant improvement from baseline pain. (Bannuru RR, Schmid CH, Kent DM, Vaysbrot EE, Wong JB, McAlindon TE. Comparative Effectiveness of Pharmacologic Interventions for Knee Osteoarthritis: A Systematic Review and Network Meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med.* 2015;162:46-54. doi:10.7326/M14-1231).

This study corroborates the recommendation of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), which represent over 9,400 rheumatologists and health professionals. In their Position Statement, ACR recommends the use of intra-articular hyaluronic acid injection for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee in adults, and states that hyaluronic acid injection is clinically indicated for management of osteoarthritis in patients who are not good candidates for surgery or who do not respond to other treatment options. ACR supports patient access to appropriate therapies including hyaluronic acid injection.

As an organization, the Arthritis Foundation is committed to ground-breaking research and welcomes new studies related to arthritis and treatment options. We appreciate the efforts by AHRQ to study the effectiveness of hyaluronic acid and summarize the findings in the current draft "Systematic Review for Effectiveness of Hyaluronic Acid in the Treatment of Severe Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) of the Knee". The review included only a limited number of studies with varying quality and many of them with small numbers of patients; therefore, drawing any significant conclusion is limited until more robust data with more uniform methodologies and studies are available.

Pain is a major driver for knee replacement. The Arthritis Foundation is aware of the differing guidelines and conclusions of other major professional organizations regarding the benefits of intra-articular hyaluronic acid injection for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee, and is concerned about the influence this publication by AHRQ would potentially have on the availability of this treatment. Until new evidence emerges from further studies for pain management options across all ages, the Arthritis Foundation cautiously advises against making decisions and policy changes based on inconclusive findings that may restrict people from accessing various treatment options that may ultimately be beneficial, including intra-articular hyaluronic acid injection for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee in adults.

As the largest and most trusted nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the needs and challenges of those living with arthritis, the Arthritis Foundation considers the patients' experience to be of primary importance when it comes to decision-making in treatments. We support the need to provide patient-centered and individualized care that leaves decisions on treatment options and assessments of effectiveness between the doctor and patient.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft manuscript "*Systematic Review for Effectiveness of Hyaluronic Acid in the Treatment of Severe Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) of the Knee.*" Should you have any questions or if we can be of assistance in any way, please contact Sandie Preiss, Vice President of Advocacy and Access, at 202-887-2910 or spreiss@arthritis.org.

Sincerely,

Csaba Siffel, MD, PhD, PMP
Health Scientist
Arthritis Foundation