

AF Marks Top Social, Scientific Milestones

EACH YEAR THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION HIGHLIGHTS THE TOP 10 MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AFFECTING THE ARTHRITIS COMMUNITY. From achievements in public policy to new research findings, 2008 was a year marked by groundbreaking developments on both scientific and social fronts. Highlights included:

► **RESEARCH REVEALS HALF OF AMERICANS WILL DEVELOP OA**

A landmark government study released in 2008 suggests nearly one in two people (45 percent) will develop painful knee osteoarthritis (OA) in their lifetime, with the highest risk among those who are obese. The study was conducted using data from a long-term study of people age 45 years or older living in rural North Carolina.

The study found that 60.5 percent of obese individuals – that is, those having a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30 – will develop symptomatic knee OA, and that those with a prior knee injury had a 57 percent probability of developing the disease. The good news is researchers

concluded that weight loss could lower the risk of knee OA.

► **STATE ARTHRITIS PROGRAMS ENHANCED**

The state-based arthritis programs funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 1999 entered a new phase. Twelve states have now been provided sufficient funds to extend the reach of effective, evidence-based interventions, such as Arthritis Foundation exercise programs; to strengthen partnerships with Arthritis Foundation chapters and others; increase public awareness; and improve the ability to monitor the burden of arthritis and coordinate activities.

► **KINASE INHIBITORS PROVE PROMISING TREATMENT FOR RA**

Although biologic agents have made dramatic improvements in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), they are expensive to produce and must be administered via injection or intravenous infusion. Last year, great strides were made toward the

development of a new type of RA medication, called kinase inhibitors, which interrupt the transfer of chemical signals involved in inflammation and can be taken by mouth.

► **BIOLOGICS APPROVED FOR CHILDREN WITH JA**

Before 2008, the only biologic agent approved by the Food and Drug Administration for children with juvenile arthritis was etanercept (*Enbrel*), which gained the OK for children in 1999. Last year two new biologic agents were approved for children: adalimumab (*Humira*) was approved by the FDA for reducing signs and symptoms of moderately to severely active polyarticular JIA in patients 4 years of age and older; and abatacept (*Orencia*) was later approved for use in patients 6 years and older.

—BETH AXTELL

◉ To see all of the Top 10 Arthritis-Related Events of 2008, visit www.arthritis.org.



A Fresh Start

The Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Program helped a mom get her life back

WHEN LESLIE SORBELLO OF RICHMOND HEIGHTS, OHIO, WAS DIAGNOSED WITH FIBROMYALGIA, the disease had already taken over most of her life.

“Within a year of being diagnosed, I was only able to work four hours on a Saturday, then I’d have to come home and stay in bed until Monday,” she recalls.

Determined to fight, Leslie says, “I wanted to take control of my illness and help myself.” Through the Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Program, she discovered techniques for managing pain, fatigue and stress, heard about a new,

more progressive medical team in her area, and received the information and support she needed. “It was encouraging to hear other people’s stories and successes, and tap the knowledge of the instructors,” she says.

Ten years after she attended her first class, Leslie now logs a busy schedule. The 45-year-old runs her own house-cleaning business, home schools her son and serves as instructor for the Self-Help Program for the Northeastern Ohio Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. Now in remission and prescription-free, Leslie says, “I can’t believe how tired I used to be. I attribute my success to the class.”

—LISA MILBRAND

◉ Contact your local chapter or visit www.arthritis.org/programs to find a Foundation program near you.