

How did we get here?

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ACTA REUMATOL PORT. 2021;46:295-296

When, in 1948, Dr. Manuel Assunção Teixeira (MAT) and other doctors created the Portuguese Association of Rheumatology (PAR), already in most of the European and American countries, north and south, Rheumatology had for decades been an established and recognised medical specialty.

Following this same delay, only in 1977 did the Portuguese Medical Association/Ordem dos Médicos (OM), recognised this specialty, seven years after the second petition¹, signed in 1970 by 1085 doctors, from various specialties and from all over the country.

Although these circumstances had significantly delayed the development of our specialty, the rheumatologists of that foundational time did not fade and did everything, nationally and internationally, to follow scientific evolution and rheumatological clinical development.

In fact, in these early years, the very few Portuguese rheumatologists were able to open (between 1952 and 1966) some hospital consultations, mainly included in Orthopaedic services, and also two Rheumatology Units inserted in Medicine Services – at the São João Hospital (SJH), Porto, in 1972, led by Professor António Lopes Vaz and the Santa Maria Hospital (SMH), Lisbon, in 1976, headed by Dr. Mário Viana Queiroz.

Most of these pioneers had obtained their rheumatological training abroad and also at the Portuguese Institute of Rheumatology (PIR).

This Institute, which was born in April 1954 (extinguishing the PAR), again by the MAT initiative, now already accompanied by Prof. Luís de Pap (LP)² and Robert Pereira Martins (RPM), among others, is an important private institution that aims at specialised assistance of rheumatic patients and continuing training in Rheumatology, which continues today in activity.

These care initiatives were accompanied by institu-

tional structuring and scientific recognition. In 1949 the PAR joined ILAR, in 1956 the Rheumatology Section of the Society of Medical Sciences of Lisbon was created, in 1967 the 6th European Congress of Rheumatology was held in Lisbon (chaired by MAT and LP led the Scientific Committee), in 1972, the Portuguese Society of Rheumatology (PSR) was founded, chaired by MAT, and in 1977³ the International Year of Rheumatism, an initiative of the World Health Organisation, had its closing session in Lisbon.

The PSR, under the direction of its 2nd president - Dr. Mendonça da Cruz (MC), - launched, in 1973, the first issue of the Acta Reumatológica Portuguesa (PSR Scientific journal), its official body, and held its first Congress, in 1974, in Coimbra.

Although the PSR has been an important driver of rheumatology since its foundation, other facts have dictated its acceleration. In 1978 the OM College of Rheumatology was created, with 24 specialists, chaired by MC and in 1980 is established, by the Ministry of Health (MH), the boarding school of the specialty (internship) of Rheumatology that begins, in 1981, in the PIR, SJH and SMH.

In 2002, the MH/General Board of Health/Direção Geral da Saúde (DGS) published the Hospital Referral Network for Rheumatology⁴. In the same year the DGS invited Prof. Mário Viana Queiroz to present a proposal of National Program against Rheumatic Diseases (PNCDR) that would be included in the new National Health Plan.

This initiative, integrated in the international campaign, Bone and Joint Decade: 2000-2010, originated the publication, in 2004, of the PNCDR that was developed until 2014.

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1. The first proposal, presented to the Portuguese Medical Association/Ordem dos Médicos (OM), for this purpose, was signed by 33 physicians in 1957 and had a negative response
2. Hungarian rheumatologist, co-founder of ILAR – International League of Associations for Rheumatology, in 1928, refugee of war in Portugal
3. Year of the creation of the specialty of Rheumatology by the OM
4. This was the first document in which the national Health Authorities recognized the deficiencies of physical, human and material resources of Rheumatology and the need to supply and address them through that proposal

TABLE I. COMPARATIVE CARE AND ACADEMIC DATA ON RHEUMATOLOGY IN PORTUGAL (10.3 MILLION INHABITANTS)

Year	2003 (n)	2021 (n) ⁷
Resources		
Rheumatologists	97	198
Rheumatology interns	30	79
Hospital Rheumatology Services/Units	8	30
PhD rheumatologists	7	23

This programme contained information, training and data collection and analysis strategies.

This enormous action has led to changes and improvements at all levels, including care, research, academics and the relationship with Primary Health Care. But the main achievement of the PNCDR was the realisation of EpiReumaPt – Epidemiological Study of Rheumatic Diseases in Portugal (2011-2013) that brought us very close to the knowledge of the national reality about rheumatic diseases and patients.

The National Register of Rheumatic Patients – Reuma.pt⁵ is a priority strategic objective of the PSR, initiated in 2006 and developed since then, with the aim of improving the quality of the follow-up and monitoring of Portuguese rheumatic patients.

The MH, in 2015, published the National Network of Hospital Specialty and Rheumatology Reference. This was the second document of its kind that lists among other specifications the needs in resources, human and other, by territorial region and by hospital.

The growth and improvement of Rheumatology in Portugal is very much due to the decisive work of the various related patients associations.

This is an ancient tradition of international and national rheumatology. The Portuguese League Against Rheumatic Diseases, founded by RPM in 1982, was the forerunner of the associations of patients with ankylosing spondylitis (ANEA, 1987), osteoporosis

(APOROS, 1994), rheumatoid arthritis (ANDAR, 1995) child and juvenile arthritis (ANDAI, 1995) and fibromyalgia (MYOS, 2003), among others.

Their actions, campaigns, due diligence and complaints, in addition to the defense of patients, also result in better information and knowledge of the population on rheumatic diseases and rheumatology.

The following table summarizes some care and academic data demonstrating the excellent evolution of Rheumatology in the last two decades. The date of 2003 was chosen because it corresponds to the holding, for the second time of the European Congress of Rheumatology, in Lisbon⁶.

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5. This initiative, was and is fundamental for the cooperation and sharing of common information between the various Rheumatology Services and Units, for the production of varied recommendations on the use of therapies, namely biological and, thus, constituting an important stimulus for clinical and epidemiological research

6. EULAR 2003 – European Congress of Rheumatology, Lisbon June 18-21, 2003

7. Official information from PSR, November 2021