Four Courses of Rheumatoid Arthritis Disease Progression

Disease onset and symptoms vary greatly between RA patients, and disease progression may take one of several courses. The archetypal models below highlight four distinct patterns of RA progression observed in patients over time.

1. **Episodic Symptoms**
   - Sudden onset of symptoms which resolve after a short duration (e.g., 6 months).

2. **Non-Progressive Cyclic Symptoms**
   - Periodic flares and remissions in symptoms, with no joint damage occurring during periods of remission.

3. **Cyclical Disease Progression**
   - Periodic flares and lulls in symptoms, with a tendency toward increasing symptom severity and damage—event during lulls.

4. **Continual Disease Progression**
   - Unwinding symptoms that worsen in severity, with increasing damage over time.

- A small minority of people (estimated at 5-10%) experience an acute version of the disease with symptoms that improve suddenly after a short period of time and leave no permanent damage. Neither the cause of the disease nor its disappearance can be fully explained medically.

- A minority of patients (approximately 15%) experience a pattern of flares (intensified symptoms) and remission over time. Periods of remission may be virtually symptom-free, but it is impossible to predict when a flare will occur.

- 40-50% of RA patients experience a cyclical pattern as the severity of their symptoms waxes and wanes. Inflammation remains, even during lulls, damage may continue to occur, and the severity of the symptoms tends to increase over time.

- As much as 30% of RA patients experience continual progression of the disease with no respite.

- Most RA patients do not experience remission. A large survey found only 6% in remission.

**Constancy of Rheumatoid Disease**

1. 70% report daily RA fatigue.
2. 67% report zero days per month when the RA pain is gone.
3. 27.65% of patients have moderate to severe pain at least 20 days per month.

*Survey of over 1,200 RA patients in our group*

**The Persistent Mortality Gap**

- Rheumatoid Arthritis is associated with a high risk of early death.
- Mortality risk for RA patients is 38% greater than for the general population.
- Mortality risk for women with RA is 55% greater than women in the general population.
- Survival rate for RA patients has not improved in the past 45 decades, which has created a widening of the mortality gap between RA patients and the general population.

**Resources**
