



Preface  
Infections and rheumatic diseases



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*Guest Editor*

Infection remains a major public health hazard and a significant clinical problem for the practicing physician, and in spite of considerable progress in preventive measures and development of newer and more powerful antimicrobial agents, it constitutes an important cause of morbidity and mortality in patients with musculoskeletal involvement. This issue of the *Rheumatic Disease Clinics of North America* presents up-to-date reviews of several important topics in the relationship between infection and the musculoskeletal system.

The opening article discusses the role of the polymerase chain reaction in the identification of microbial components in the joint space and its potential clinical applications in the diagnosis and management of reactive arthritis. This is followed by a coherent and well-presented review of pathogenic mechanisms operating in reactive arthritis. A novel hypothesis is put forward emphasizing the central role of CD 4+ T lymphocytes and an altered HLA-B 27–induced endoplasmic reticulum overloaded protein response.

Clinical aspects and key advances in the diagnosis and therapeutic management of reactive arthritis is discussed next. The potential role of enteric commensal microorganisms is underscored. Comprehensive and balanced discussions of septic arthritis and soft-tissue infections follow with emphasis on the seriousness of their complications and constant mortality rates for septic arthritis despite the use of newer and more powerful antibiotics.

The clinical usefulness of imaging techniques in the diagnosis of soft-tissue and skeletal infection is extensively reviewed and representative imaging studies presented. The relationship between hepatitis C and inflammatory articular complications and its differential diagnoses are discussed.

The next two articles deal with retrovirus-induced arthritis and other autoimmune complications. HIV infection remains an important and relevant infection to mankind. At the recent XIV International AIDS conference held in Barcelona, Spain, from July 7 to 12, 2002, it was concluded that the epidemic is “out of control” and is still in its “early stages.” It has been estimated that in the next 20 years, 70 million people will die as a result of the disease. Arthritis is a common complication of HIV infection, especially in Central Africa, and merits discussion in any review dealing with infection and the musculoskeletal system.

Infection in connective tissue disorders including systemic lupus erythematosus, scleroderma, and polymyositis/dermatomyositis is well-covered. Most common causative microorganisms as well as their impact in mortality rates on these disorders are presented.

The final article is of special interest and discusses the infectious complications associated with the use of biologic agents. These agents have had a considerable impact in the management of rheumatoid arthritis and other arthritides; however, concern remains regarding the occurrence of infectious complications—particularly tuberculosis. This topic is well discussed and appropriately referenced.

This issue represents the collective effort of experts on the different topics covered and provides an outline of the major advances that have occurred in the field in the past five years. I am most grateful to all contributors and especially to Barton Dudlick at WB Saunders for his confidence and support in the preparation of this monograph.

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