

# VALUE OF REMISSION

## An Advocacy Roundtable Summary

*Singapore • August 2024*



On August 22, 2024, patient advocacy leaders and healthcare professionals from across the Asia Pacific region came together adjacent to the annual Asia-Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology Congress to discuss the value of achieving remission in people with inflammatory rheumatic diseases.

The group responded to an [INITIAL REPORT](#) produced by the Global Alliance for Patient Access on the topic of remission in inflammatory rheumatic conditions. Participants also identified challenges and solutions specific to their region.

### Benefits & Obstacles

Remission in inflammatory rheumatic conditions is characterised by the absence of disease signs and symptoms. For some people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and spondylarthritis (SpA), remission has become possible thanks to advances in treatment.

Remission can be temporary or permanent. While it cannot always be achieved, it should be the target for all patients. That's because achieving remission can mean a profound transformation in quality of life for people with rheumatic conditions like RA and SpA. Patients in remission have less pain and greater function, meaning better health and more independence.

In addition to improving patients' quality of life, remission offers value to health systems by reducing costs. Studies show that patients in remission also have lower direct and indirect medical costs compared with those without remission. This can be due to fewer hospitalisations, joint surgeries and radiographs.

Yet, despite therapeutic advances making remission more achievable, patients often settle for adequate instead of holding out for optimal care. Patient advocates have increasingly raised the importance of remission at recent GAfPA meetings.

### Policy Change

Healthcare systems should develop and prioritise policies which support the pursuit of remission. This will enable a better quality of life for patients and deliver economic benefits to the healthcare system and wider society.

To build capacity, healthcare systems can encourage greater use of digital health interventions, like telemedicine and videoconferencing. This can work well for patients who are stable and live in remote areas.

Policymakers can also optimise the patient experience by supporting patient groups, which can play a crucial role in providing disease management support.

Advocates also need evidence-based data to help them raise awareness of the importance of achieving remission. The [EVIDENCE GLOSSARY](#) released by the Global Alliance for Patient Access provides data to help meet this need.



## Speaker Spotlight

During the meeting, Prof Andrew Ostor from the Cabrini Medical Center in Melbourne, Australia

provided a review of the economic value of remission and disease control.

Prof Ostor noted that some of the severe symptoms, like deformities seen in rheumatoid arthritis, have nearly disappeared in places with good service provision. Challenges remain, however, especially in lower-income countries, where access to specialists is extremely limited.

Healthcare decisions historically have been driven primarily by cost considerations, Prof Ostor reflected. But it is essential to recognise the broader benefits of treatments that go beyond direct costs. These include reduced indirect costs, like those associated with patients needing caregiving, early retirement, and decreased productivity due to illness.

A comprehensive review revealed that achieving remission can lower direct medical costs by 19-52% and reduce indirect costs by up to 75%. Although this data is specific to rheumatoid arthritis, it suggests similar benefits in other conditions like spondylarthritis and connective tissue diseases.

Despite these benefits, access to remission-inducing therapies is not consistent worldwide. While some countries, like Australia and Japan, have broad access, others do not, leading to unnecessarily wide disparities in patient outcomes.

The economic impact of achieving remission is profound. It reduces the need for joint surgeries, hospitalisations, and even routine imaging and therapy sessions. This shift has led to fewer physician visits and less need for occupational therapy for rheumatoid arthritis patients.

## Advocacy & Access

Evidence clearly demonstrates that achieving remission reduces both direct and indirect economic burdens. These data can be used globally to advocate for better access to care, though it needs to be tailored to specific regional contexts.

For example, telehealth has become a valuable tool, as witnessed during COVID-19, enabling more efficient care without the need for frequent in-person visits. The benefit is especially pronounced in remote areas.

Participants agreed on the urgent need for better access to remission-inducing treatments. They also acknowledged the need to tailor advocacy to the specific needs and challenges across the Asia Pacific region to improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. With collaboration and a tailored approach, patients and communities across the region can enjoy the multiple benefits of remission.



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