UAB clinicians and scientists are integrating cutting-edge technologies of antigen identification in a search for novel information on the microbial contributions to spondyloarthritis (SpA). They hope their data will result in new insights into pathogenesis of SpA, which includes such conditions as ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, and reactive arthritis. This project may also suggest potential new biomarkers for diagnosis and monitoring, and lead to new approaches to therapy by manipulating the microbiota and adaptive immune responses to it.

“We are going to explore the link between the microbiota and SpA, as we suspect the microbiota has a marked effect on the systemic and mucosal immune systems that involve this condition,” says pediatric rheumatologist Matthew Stoll, MD.

SpA affects between 0.5% and 2% of the US population and is characterized by an asymmetrical inflammatory arthritis, spondylitis, and enthesitis, with risk of extra-articular complications. Stoll calls SpA treatment “less than optimal,” with poor responses to agents that benefit other forms of arthritis.

He is working with gastroenterologist and researcher Charles Elson, MD, in the study, which is one project in UAB’s NIH-funded Multidisciplinary Clinical Research...
The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic: A Collaborative Pilot Project

The UAB Health System is piloting an innovative Integrated Practice Unit to meet the demand for patient care for musculoskeletal disorders. The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic is a collaborative effort of faculty and staff of the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology, the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and diseases are the leading cause of disability in the US. In 2001, 107.7 million adults reported suffering from a musculoskeletal condition lasting 3 months or longer. Musculoskeletal disorders are seen as an interrelated set of patient medical circumstances that can be best managed in an integrated way by multiple specialists. When fully operational, an Integrated Practice Unit will provide the full range of care for a medical condition or group of closely related conditions.

“One of the major goals of this pilot project is to see how well this will allow us to better meet the demand for evaluation of patients with musculoskeletal symptoms,” says S. Louis Bridges, Jr, MD, PhD, director of the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology. Amie McLean, MD, chair of the UAB Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, says the multidisciplinary approach will provide more timely, high-quality care for patients with these conditions.

“Another advantage of this clinic is to help expedite referrals to the specialists who can best address the problem at hand,” says Steven Thiers, MD, director of the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery.

If this pilot clinic shows promise, it will be expanded from the initial 2 half-days per week. Future benefits may include enhanced educational activities in musculoskeletal medicine for trainees such as residents and fellows, clinical initiatives focused on quality improvement, facilitation of patient education, knowledge dissemination, and standardization of collection of patient relevant and reported outcomes to improve clinical care.

The physicians say that the Musculoskeletal Clinic may also lead to collaborative research among experts in Rheumatology, PM&R, and Orthopedics to understand optimal management of musculoskeletal syndromes.

The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic is located at The Workplace at UAB Hospital–Highlands.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

UAB’s Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology
Outpatient Clinic Visit Volume

UAB Rheumatology continues to identify opportunities to improve patient access to outpatient care. The division’s clinic increased visits by about 15% from 2012 to 2013.


Saag Cited for Investigative Mentoring

Kenneth Saag, MD, MSc, has been named the first UAB faculty member to receive the 2013 Rheumatology Research Foundation Excellence in Investigative Mentoring Award. One member of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) is selected each year for this honor, which recognizes the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship. Saag will be honored at the Opening Ceremony of the ACR meeting in San Diego in October 2013 and at the UAB reception to be held at that event.

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Bridges SL Jr, Thiers, and McClain says Steven Thiers, MD, director of the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery.

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