

15 March 2020

Dear SARAA members and affiliates

The South African Rheumatism and Arthritis Association has officially suspended all SARAA regional and national academic, educational and administrative meetings until further notice, with effect from 16 March 2020.

This pertains to any organised gatherings where the potential for the spread of COVID-19 is possible. This includes the regional SARAA academic meetings, young rheumatology forum initiatives and the rheumatology nurse forum. We encourage web-based meetings if necessary.

We believe that it is our responsibility to ensure the safety of our members, colleagues and friends, and importantly our patients, already at high-risk of potentially severe disease, if infected.

It is important not to be complacent with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. A second wave of infection outside of China has hit; accounting for 48.53% of all infections. South Africa as of 15th March 2020 has **51** documented cases and this number is rising. Our patients are in the upper tier of most vulnerable to COVID-19. Current statistics indicate a 14% mortality in immunocompromised and elderly with co-morbid disease.

Furthermore, we implore all members to avoid international and unnecessary national travel at this time. This pertains especially to international meetings and congresses, which have as yet not been cancelled.

Please look out for our COVID-19 page on the SARAA website, which will be up and running next week. It will include links to important websites for information on COVID-19 in general, as well as specific to the rheumatology patient. We will also post regular updates regarding conferences and travel, as well potential involvement in the ACR Global registry.

Regards,



Kavita Makan

President

On behalf of SARAA EXCO

