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Sjogren’s Autoimmune Disease

# Introduction

It was a cold winter day and I had just run a half marathon for Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center Fred’s Team in Central Park. I thought the joint pain might have been related to the race considering I had never suffered from joint pain in the past. As the weeks went by my symptoms didn’t improve. I began feeling fatigued and the joint pain had worsened. What started as a pain in my legs and thigh area had spread to my hands and wrists. I was extremely anxious. Working in a hospital surrounded by illness, your mind plays tricks on you. I was worried it was an autoimmune disease, but I wasn't thinking of a form of arthritis. I was thinking more like Lupus. I quickly mentioned my concerns to my primary physician who then referred me to see a Rheumatologist. They ordered labs and after a long week of waiting, my doctor was calling me with my results. I had Sjogren’s.

# What exactly Sjorgen disease is

## Brief Overview

Sjogren is an autoimmune disorder that can occur at any age, but it is most common in older women. Patients develop the disease as a complication of another autoimmune disease like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis. Most of the treatment process includes relieving the symptoms of dry eyes and dry mouth. This can help prevent complications in long-term like dental and infection issues. However, the treatment does not eliminate the symptoms of dryness completely. Rare complications have been described as the risk factor for the cancer of lymph glands which will require medical care and intervention. Joint pain, fatigue, dry mouth, and dry eyes are all symptoms which can affect the patient and in worse causes can also cause the dysfunction of organs. Organs that can be affected are the central nervous system, pancreas, liver, lungs, blood vessels, gastrointestinal system, and the kidney. There are four million adults in the United States that face the symptoms of Sjogren Syndrome. People of any age can be, and usually, those in the age of 45-55 are most vulnerable. Women are more affected than male patients.

## Why Sjorgen’s disease is still around

The disease can significantly impact the social and cultural life of an individual. There are four million Americans facing Sjogren's disease. It is one of the most common autoimmune illnesses. As the disease was first identified in 1933 by Dr. Henrik Sjogren, it has been proven that illness has affected every ethnic and racial group of the society. There is still a lack of general awareness about the disease along with its positive and negative aspects. A proper plan of intervention is devised by the founder, and also there is an availability of video for those who are new to the illness. Education could be the one source that can resolve the technicalities for the disease1. The promotion of public service or special education can help the patient in getting a better social understanding and could increase interaction through reasonable expenses1. The inexpensive and effective treatment is required for the reduction in financial burden on the families and especially on the health care system. It can also support the deprived community in the social setting where a patient could increase the interaction and take part in the progress of society.

# Challenges accompanying Sjrogen

## Brief Overview

Medical and social scholars are of the view that an overwhelming majority of patients are living with the Sjogren Syndrome. With every passing day, it is challenging the issues of social concerns for the patients. At the workplace and home, there is limiting the ability to cope with the disease as the Harris Poll surveyed on behalf of the Sjogren Syndrome Foundation. It was also found that there are three thousand patients with the age of 18 or more are facing the illness. These individuals have shared their views and experiences along with the emotional effects of living with the disease in the country. More than half of the patient described that fifty percent faced dry mouth, fifty-four percent fatigue and the same ratio of people met dry eyes

## Social Impact

The syndrome has a significant impact on the lives of common people. There was seventy percent of patients who responded that the illness had limited their social experience and it created hindrance in the way of things they need to do every day1. Many patients in most of the cases have a lot of negative impacts on participating in social activities, hobbies, and other extracurricular movements. The disease of eight percent patient who said that they make at least one day-to-day change around the house like the cutting and stopping of the house along with the hiring of additional service providers to help with child care or housecleaning. These experiences and the stories of people with diseases reflect that their life became limited and they are unable to play an important or progressive role in society1. One factor of the body is linked with other and same is the case of Sjogren which effects one part of an organization and make the person paralyzed to move for any progressive position in the society.

# Coping with Sjorgen

## Early Days with Sjorgen

In the initial phase of the disease, many patients had shared their views and experiences when the diagnosis was not established properly. They described it as challenging for them to maintain their emotional and mental balance. Physicians or the rheumatologist mostly suspected that these people have some psychiatric or psychological disorder which restricts them to play an active role in the society. Medical specialists after examining the case referred these patients to the psychologists for mental stability and intervention of emotionally challenged condition. The excessive demand or the feeling of being an encumbrance for a family is due to the complaints and worries about the future are important aspects of patients. The criticisms of the patients’ recognized that they suffered additional pressure with their job and family.

## Each day with Sjorgen

Patients of the Sjogren mostly feel the dependency on relatives in everyday life. Most of the patients have a bad experience as they are unable to drive a car because of their dry eyes. Additionally, they are unable to handle the household without other help2. These patients have increased levels of pain. The dryness can cause difficulties at work primarily in the case of computer work. Same is the fact with parents where they feel that long conversation with their children and relatives is challenging and even they have difficulty in sharing the ideas and programs. Officials or the working people also have issues because they have to deal with customers, but the sickness and dry mouth create issues for them. Despite feeling sick, they serve, and they were also afraid of losing their job which is the important source of their respect in the society.

# Effects on the Body

Apart from the impairment of social life, many patients experience fatigue. They experience difficulties in managing daily affairs and interactions2. One of the patients of Sjogren syndrome describes that he is mostly feeling tired especially when his friends call him and they wanted to go out after completing their official hours. However, he has no energy to serve and play with his friends due to the tiredness and lack of energy. He tells them that it is ok and he has to do some work. He is happy with his work and life and has no more energy to go outside for a walk or some other entertainment. The situation shows that a patient has limited experience. In other words, they devise a circle wherein they cannot cross the boundaries.

Same is the case with another experience of the female who describes that Sjogren syndrome has cropped up various issues in her life. Furthermore, her husband has adjusted to this situation. However, she complains about her social and personal life that the illness restrict us from doing anything through collaborative efforts. She unfolds that she has to take care because with caring she will be alone which would be worst for her. She complains in a more depressive tone that people in society are living a happy and healthy life. However, she wishes she could have such type of life which is free from the pain.

One more patient of the Sjogren reflected about the social life and issues faced by him after an attack by the disease2. He cannot go outside because the disease attacked his wife and everything is now painful for him. Even in the evening time, she cannot go outside. He missed all the moments he passed before his marriage where he was healthy and also free to go everywhere. However, after getting married, he became impaired and others in his social circle cannot understand what they are going through. His friends are busy with their lives enjoying without caring for him.

# Conclusion

The pains and the social suffering of these people show that Sjogren illness significantly impacted the lives of an ordinary man living in American society. After the illness, social life and even the daily routine at home is disturbed3. The first attack of the disease leads to all other pains because when a patient feels that he or she has contracted the disease, it directly effects on the mind and their emotional feeling which has a link with other organs. Society on the other hand also does not care for such type of people. Negligence can cause the death of the patient of Sjogren.

Medical practitioners and physicians have various models to treat the people suffering from Sjogren autoimmune disease. For every person, there is a different method. It depends on the parts of the body that are affected. Although there is no cure, drug treatment and medication are the options used by medical staff. The drugs that include the mucus and saliva along with the artificial tears and eye ointment can support the patient with chronic dryness.

The problems like the extra-glandular are mostly treated with non-steroidal and anti-inflammatory drugs NSAIDs. In the same way the problems of the nervous system, blood vessels and kidneys are also treated with particular medication3. There are significant issues with the patient that can be resolved through the diagnosis and evaluation of experts. It also includes the dentist and eye doctors to examine their part for a significant decrease in the effects of the Sjogren disease.

The research I’ve done on Sjogren’s has supported the negative outcomes Sjogren’s has on the individual’s life. While many illnesses are hard to accept and manage, I believe with illness it’s important to educate yourself and be informed. We are more likely to manage our health and better understand what obstacles are ahead of our illness.

End Notes

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3. Rosen, Antony, and Livia Casciola-Rosen. "Autoantigens as partners in the initiation and propagation of autoimmune rheumatic diseases." *Annual review of Immunology* 34 (2016): 39