

Request for Proposals – SPARTAN Referral Recommendations

9/15/20

The SPARTAN Board of Directors is initiating the process of developing SPARTAN referral recommendations for patients with chronic back pain who may have axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA). As a first step, we are asking for a letter of intent (LOI) from SPARTAN members interested in leading this effort. The goal of this RFP is to identify project leadership and collect ideas on how to carry out the project. Next steps will be determined by the board upon review of the received LOIs.

Rationale. Delayed rheumatology assessment of patients with chronic back pain who may have axSpA is a major reason for the prolonged interval between symptom onset and diagnosis in many patients with axSpA. Several studies, mostly from Europe, demonstrated that, using appropriate screening tools, patients with increased likelihood of having axSpA can be identified in orthopedic and general medicine practice settings leading to an enrichment of axSpA from ~5% in unselected patients with chronic back pain to ~35% in patients referred for rheumatology assessment in these studies. ASAS-endorsed recommendations for the early referral of patients with a suspicion of axSpA were published in 2015 (Poddubnyy et al. Ann Rheum Dis 2015;74:1483-7). Considering differences in healthcare environments, the SPARTAN Board of Directors considers the development of referral recommendations for North America an important step in improving the care for patients with axSpA and a high priority project for SPARTAN. Critical questions to be answered include (1) which screening tools (questionnaires, laboratory tests, imaging) should be used, (2) who should interpret the results and (3) what are the criteria that should trigger referral to rheumatology or, alternatively, rule out axSpA without the need for rheumatology assessment.

Scope. We envision that this SPARTAN project will entail:

- assembly of an expert panel with representation of relevant stakeholders
- systematic review of the existing literature
- development and publication of referral recommendations
- identification of knowledge gaps requiring further research (research agenda)

We anticipate that the project will lead to follow-up studies to fill identified knowledge gaps or test the performance of the recommendations in clinical practice.

Eligibility. All SPARTAN full members are eligible to submit an LOI, either individually or as member of a team. Associate members may co-submit an LOI together with a full member.

LOI specifications. The LOI (maximum 2 pages) should include:

- outline of a strategy for the development of referral recommendations
(This should include methods [including the favored underlying guideline standards/approach, i.e. GRADE, RAND, ACR, EULAR], timeline, inclusion of stakeholders, etc.)
- estimate of funding needs (no detailed budget required, no funding guaranteed)
- description of relevant experiences and qualifications for leading the project
- NIH biosketch (not included in 2-page limit)

Please direct any questions regarding this RFP to Lisa Spiegel, SPARTAN Executive Director, lisa@spartangroup.org. SPARTAN members who would like to participate but do not desire to lead the project may indicate their interest in an informal email to Lisa. Deadline for submission of the LOI (via e-mail to Lisa) is Friday, 10/30/20.