



Australian Rheumatology Association

ARA Position Statement on Stem Cell Therapies

- Osteoarthritis is a leading cause of pain and disability for the Australian population particularly in the elderly.
- There is currently no disease modifying therapy that has a credible evidence base for osteoarthritis and this represents a major challenge for rheumatologists and researchers in rheumatology.
- Cell based therapies are a promising treatment strategy that merit basic and clinical research leading to properly conducted randomised controlled trials.
- Autologous Cell Based Interventions (ACBIs) involve the collection and administration of a patient's own cells. In certain conditions, for example burns victims and in haematological malignancies there is good evidence of clinical efficacy. For osteoarthritis this most commonly involves harvesting fat cells, purifying, stimulating and re-injecting them into the osteoarthritic joint. At this point there is no high-quality evidence base to be confident of the safety and efficacy of this treatment.
- Stem cell treatments/ACBIs by their nature are complex and may involve variations in the cells used, the conditions under which the cells are handled, the matrix that supports the cells and the (growth) factors used to stimulate cells, thus carefully controlled trials and long term observational studies are indicated.
- The International Society for Stem Cell Research has issued a statement that "When a professional consensus on the safety and therapeutic value of a treatment is lacking, the ISSCR believes it is unethical and unprofessional to market such interventions directly to patients". The ARA supports this statement.
- At this point the ARA recognizes the need for ongoing research in the area of stem cell/cellular regenerative treatments.
- There is currently not enough supportive evidence to recommend stem cell therapy/ACBIs as a clinical intervention for osteoarthritis outside of a clinical trial setting.
- Non-evidence based treatments and particularly therapies that involve significant cost to the patient and pose unknown potential for harm, should be discouraged.