G9–9th National Gathering Conference in Nashville!

Get ready for some peer to peer support and education in Music City! We are pleased to announce the 9th (G9) National Gathering Conference will take place at the Nashville Radisson Airport Hotel May 20-22, 2016 with a special rate of $129 + tax per night. Registration is now open. Early Bird Registration fee is $65. Applications for needs-based scholarships begins February 8, 2016.

Join us for an opportunity to make new supportive friends and receive education for you and your loved ones. Keep an eye on your email for additional information and don’t forget to join the Facebook Group.

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Love, Relationships and Rheumatic Conditions by Sri Ramakumar

Sri Ramakumar is a freelance writer with a Master of Science (MS) in Family Studies & Human Development and a Master of Social Work (MSW). Ms. Ramakumar will be conducting an ongoing series of articles related to coping and thriving with the social and emotional side of rheumatic and arthritis related conditions. By following this series, readers can learn about the social and emotional impact of the disease along with learning the necessary tools to help deal with the often overlooked aspects of these conditions.

As Valentine’s Day approaches, it seems like a good time to pause and take a moment to consider love in the time of rheumatic disease. It has been well documented that a stressor like chronic illness can put unique pressures on partners in a relationship. Relationships have been known to crumble under those pressures. But in those relationships that do hold strong, many partners find that facing a chronic illness together actually brings them closer. Furthermore, fulfilling relationships have been shown to be a protective factor, increasing well-being and reducing inflammation.

So how do partners keep love alive when faced with a rheumatic disease? It turns out there are several specific and important things couples can do. This includes:

1. Communication. One of the pitfalls many couples fall into is having all their communication revolve around the illness, and forgetting to make time to communicate as a couple. Here are some strategies:
   - Talk openly and honestly about how chronic illness has changed your relationship. The focus here is your relationship, not the illness. Use it as a time to acknowledge how things are different and to come up with ideas how to move forward from here.
   - Make a “date” each day (over morning coffee, in the evening after kids are in bed) to spend a half-hour just catching up with each other. Each person should take a moment to share one positive thing that happened that day, and one positive thing about their partner.

2. Shared Experiences. When a partner has a rheumatoid condition, pain and fatigue can limit on what you what couples do together, and can even limit intimacy. This can create a feeling of disconnect between partners. Instead of focusing cannot do as a couple, it’s more constructive to focus on what you can do.
   - Foster closeness by doing something that feels good to both of you, such as a warm bath together or a couple’s massage.
   - Take time to find things you can both enjoy, such as watching a movie listening to music, or taking a drive together.
   - Exercise together. Exercise is beneficial both for stress reduction and health maintenance for both partners. Exercises such as swimming, walking, yoga, or tai-chi are good ways to work-out together.
   - Keep up with friendships, as much as possible. Chronic illness can make people feel isolated; not just the person with the illness, but their partner, as well. Going out (or ordering take-out) with friends can help couples feel connected and be able to enjoy each other socially in a group setting.

3. Family Life. For couples with children, the stress of raising a family can feel exhausting and overwhelming. One partner may feel overburdened caring for the family while the other can feel guilty for not being able to do everything they want for their children. If left unchecked, resentments can build on both sides.
   - Be flexible about adjusting responsibilities. For individuals with rheumatic conditions, each day can be a different story. Create plans for how you will both handle “good days” and “bad days.”
   - Focus on dividing household responsibilities based on each partner’s strengths and abilities. For instance, one partner may cook meals while the other plans them. Or, one partner may give the kids a bath, while the other reads bedtime stories.
   - Do not allow guilt or resentments to build. It is ok to tell your partner, “I feel so guilty that I cannot take Jimmy to school today.” Or, “I really need a break from cooking today.” It will help your partner understand what it must feel like for each of you.

Love and relationships are positive forces in our lives. Maintaining love and relationships in the face of chronic illness requires adjusting how partners interact and spend time with each other. Both sides benefit when relationships are put back into focus, and in fact, they can become even stronger.
Hello, out there all you autoimmune arthritis cousins. As you can see, our winter theme is all about the heart. Oh, that fabulous organ that pumps and pumps with precision, all on its own with nary a thought in our heads about it. But, bear with us here for a bit because it’s that time of year again when ‘hearts are thumping and you’ need to pay attention to them. It is American Heart Month. That’s right! And because many of us with inflammatory forms of arthritis are twice as likely to develop cardiovascular disease, than others, we are doing our best to bring this situation to light.

The Mayo Clinic has deemed this serious enough to create a whole clinic devoted to helping people with inflammatory types of arthritis and other rheumatologic and autoimmune conditions get the evaluations, diagnosis and treatments they need.

We took a moment to ask Dr. John M. Davis III, M.D., a Mayo Clinic rheumatologist in Rochester, Minn., who works with the Mayo Cardio-Rheumatology Clinic a few questions about this timely subject.

**What types of heart disease are rheumatic patients more prone to having?** Coronary artery disease, myocardial infarctions (i.e., heart attacks), heart failure, strokes, heart valve disorders (i.e., valve nodules, thickening, and leaking) and rarely myocarditis.

**What tests should persons with rheumatic disease be requesting to better assess their cardiovascular health?** Screening for usual cardiovascular risk factors is very important. Blood pressure screening, fasting blood glucose, and lipid testing are recommended as they are for people in general.

Determining estimated 10-year cardiovascular risk as recommended by the American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology is key in determining at what point medications become indicated for the treatment of high cholesterol.

**What proactive steps can be taken to prevent risk?** Patients should inquire about their cardiovascular health with their primary care providers and rheumatologists. They should engage in weight loss and exercise programs under the supervision of their physicians. It is very important that patients with active rheumatic diseases seek consultation with their rheumatologists about modifying their medical treatment to target remission.

When should a person with rheumatic disease seek a cardiology specialist? There are no hard and fast rules about which patients should see a cardiologist. At our institution, we offer a “Cardio-Rheumatology Clinic” in which a cardiologist sees patients with rheumatic diseases who do not have any heart history for cardiovascular risk assessment and management. In general, patients above the age of 50 years with more severe rheumatic diseases should talk to their physicians about their need to see a cardiologist. The most important thing right now is that patients are being screened for risk factors for heart disease and symptoms of heart disease during routine care and that identified risk factors are being treated.

So, what’s love got to do with it? EVERYTHING! Please love yourself enough to get a wellness check-up this year and make sure to mention your added risk of heart disease. Open a dialogue with your rheumatologist about your heart health and added heart disease risk. Check out our *Heart Healthy* Recipes and get plenty of exercise. Because who loves you, baby? We do!
Heart Healthy Meal Recipes to Please Your Valentine by Carolyn Kosanouvong-Walker

Carolyn resides in CA and is the ORS for the AI Support Group in Fresno County. She was diagnosed with Juvenile Onset Rheumatoid Arthritis since 3 years old. Living with a rheumatic condition for over 40 years has been a physical and emotional challenge as a result of severe joint deformities and chronic pain. Carolyn enjoys cooking just like her mom! She has a personal blog on Facebook titled: Happiness is in the Kitchen as she shares memories of food, fun, and family.

February is American Heart Month according to the American Heart Association. It is also Valentine’s Day month! According to an article cited on WebMD, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the U.S. For the majority of us living with Rheumatoid Arthritis or other Rheumatic conditions, we are at greater risk of developing heart disease. Some medical experts believe the inflammation in RA may raise inflammation throughout the whole body, including the heart’s coronary arteries.

We can take action to lower that risk by making healthy choices such as eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat protein (such as poultry, fish, beans, nuts, seeds, and low-fat dairy products). In addition, we need to limit salt intake and avoid foods made with Trans fats.

This Valentine’s Day, why not prepare a heart healthy and delicious meal for your sweetheart or the loves in your life. Here are a few simple dishes that are easy to make right in your kitchen.

Asian Sesame Baked Salmon

**Ingredients** – This makes 2 servings (for 4 servings, double the recipe)

- 2 salmon fillets (if using frozen salmon, thaw in refrigerator before cooking)
- ¼ cup low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ½ tablespoon toasted sesame seed

**Directions**

In a small bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, orange juice, garlic, ginger, brown sugar, and black pepper. Place the salmon fillets in a baking dish and pour the marinade mixture over the salmon. Then cover the baking dish with plastic wrap and allow the salmon fillets to marinate for at least 30 min. in the refrigerator.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Bring out the salmon from the refrigerator, with a spoon, drain some of the marinade juice and sprinkle the sesame seed equally on each fillet. Place the baking dish in the oven and bake for 15-20 min or until salmon is cooked through.

Salmon is a nutritional fish because it’s rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which is a type of unsaturated fat that helps reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. This fatty fish also fights inflammation from autoimmune disease such as rheumatoid arthritis. Fatty fish also contain vitamin D, which helps decrease RA’s swelling and soreness. The American Heart Association recommends eating at least 2 (3.5 oz.) servings of fatty fish like salmon once a week. Continued on page 5
Quinoa Salad with Sesame-Ginger Dressing
This recipe makes 4 servings

**Ingredients**
- ½ cup organic tri-color quinoa
- 1 cup water
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup broccoli slaw mix
- ½ cup baby corn, cut to bite size (baby corn comes in a can located in the specialty food section of the grocery store)

**For the dressing (makes about ¼ cup dressing):**
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 teaspoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 small clove of garlic, grated
- Pinch of red pepper flakes

**Directions**
Depending on the brand of quinoa that you have, you may need to rinse the quinoa in a bowl and drain before cooking. Some brands indicate on the box, pre-washed, no rinsing. Put the quinoa in a small sauce pan with water and ¼ teaspoon kosher salt. Boil over high heat, then reduce heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook, uncovered, for about 15 min. Set aside off the heat for 5 min. While the quinoa is cooking, whisk together all the ingredients for the sesame-ginger dressing. Then transfer the quinoa to a bowl and fluff with a fork. Toss in the broccoli slaw mix and baby corn. Drizzle the dressing over the quinoa and vegetable mixture and gently toss to coat dressing. Serve as a side dish with the baked salmon.

Quinoa is naturally gluten-free and contains iron, B-vitamins, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, vitamin E and fiber. By incorporating 2-3 servings of whole grain foods per day like quinoa, it can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, colon cancer, and obesity.

After a delicious meal, you can treat yourself and your loved one with a vegan chocolate pudding. This was my first time making a vegan recipe, which uses avocado, cocoa powder, and coconut cream as the main ingredients and “oh my goodness,” I call this a heavenly decadent pudding! It has a shiny appearance with a smooth and silky texture that is undescribable. I guarantee you that your family and friends will not believe that it’s made with avocado.

For this recipe and preparation photos, please visit my Facebook personal blog page titled *Happiness is in the Kitchen*.

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**Arthritis Introspective**

A Proud Member of the Arthritis Foundation Family
Part Five: The Pain Plan—Your Toolbox of Strategies

Knowledge is power. Knowledge and education about rheumatic diseases can help combat the feelings of fear and uncertainty that often fuel denial. Developing a toolbox of strategies can help you feel empowered to deal with issues as they come up. This is known as your Pain Plan. You can then reach for your pain plan whenever the need arises.

Your Pain Plan is also a useful resource for support people in your life, as well as your healthcare providers, to communicate what is or is not working for you. Your Pain Plan is a journal that serves as a record of a toolbox of strategies that you have found to be effective. Elements of your pain plan can include:

A daily record of pain and symptoms
Medications you have taken and their efficacy and side effects. Medication options can include the following:

- Analgesics—medications used for the control of pain.
- NSAIDS—(non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are medications that can reduce pain and inflammation. These include aspirin and ibuprofen (Advil), which are over-the-counter, as well as prescription medications such as a COX-2 inhibitor.
- DMARDs (disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs) — prescription medications, such as methotrexate, that also reduce pain and inflammation, and can potentially slow the progression of joint damage.
- Corticosteroids—medications that reduce pain and inflammation during acute symptom flare-ups.
- Biologics—medications that can slow joint damage by blocking the part of the immune system that causes inflammation.
- Narcotics—prescription medications that provide high levels of pain management. However, long-term narcotic use can lead to both tolerance (where larger doses of the drug are needed to achieve pain control) and to addiction.

Non-medication pain-control strategies you may have tried. These are great toolbox strategies you can refer to and utilize during times of flare-ups, as well as for general well-being, and can include:

- Light massage
- Topical Creams
- Hot Bath or Hot or Cold Compresses
- Deep breathing or Meditation
- Relaxation
- Distraction
- Splints or Compression Sleeves
- Ultrasound or Electrical Stimulation (TENS)
- Acupuncture

Diet and nutritional modifications you may have attempted. There is emerging evidence to suggest that some foods can help reduce inflammation in the body while others may increase it. Continued on page 7
Part Five: The Pain Plan—Your Toolbox of Strategies  

You can use an elimination diet, where you eliminate one food at a time per week, to see if symptoms get better.

- Reducing foods with omega-6 fatty acids, which can contribute to inflammation if consumed in large amounts. These include foods such as grilled meats, corn and safflower oils, and egg yolks.
- Increasing foods with omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce inflammation, and are found in fish, nuts, and leafy green vegetables.
- For some people with rheumatoid arthritis, foods such as dairy and shrimp can be problematic.
- Also, according to some studies, taking Vitamin E supplements may help lessen pain and slow joint damage over time.

Exercise options that work for you. Being physically active helps with joint pain, increases mobility, promotes overall health, and provides a sense of emotional well-being. However, for many people with rheumatic conditions, movement can often be painful and difficult. That is why it is important to find the right kind of exercise that allows movement without adding too much stress to joints. Low-impact exercises, which are gentle on joints, tend to work best. Examples include:

- Walking
- Swimming (or any other water-based exercise like hydro-aerobics)
- Cycling (on a recumbent bike)
- Yoga
- Tai Chi

It will take time, and some trial and error, to find the right combination of toolbox strategies that will ultimately work for you. But taking the time to find those strategies and developing a good Pain Plan can go a long way to helping you find both well-being and empowerment in dealing with your rheumatic condition.

Toolbox Take-Away:

Development of Pain Plan, a journal where you record a toolbox of strategies that work for you, can assist in helping you feel empowered in managing your rheumatoid condition, and can help communicate what is or is not working for you to your support people and healthcare providers.

A Pain Plan usually consists of:

1) A daily record of pain and symptoms,
2) Medications taken and their effectiveness and side-effects,
3) Non-medication strategies that may be helpful such as meditation, massage, etc.
4) Dietary changes you may have tried
5) Exercise that has been effective for you.

Recommended Reading:

Medications Used in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Conditions: RA.com
Non-Medication Strategies: rheumatoidarthritis.com
Nutritional Information: Diet & Exercise Tips: Activebeat.com
I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” - Maya Angelou

If you've ever felt a smile form on your face because someone that makes you laugh just walked into the room, then you understand what it's like to know a person that makes you feel good. It warms the heart. Since there are the people that can have the opposite effect, having the folks in your life that brighten your spirits is priceless. To be one of those individuals is a blessing, and thankfully, acquiring those redeeming qualities is not impossible.

When you deal with a chronic illness, you learn how valuable it is to be around people that try to understand you - not feel sorry for you. While my JRA was never something I shared with the kids I went to school with, there were some that could pick up on the obvious struggles I had on a difficult day. It's nice to remember the friend that reaches over and simply pops open the soda can instead of the kid that blurts out, “are you limping?” Feeling accepted and liked is priceless and fortunately, we can be the bright spot in someone's day with a few easy tips.

1. Make eye contact. In the day of screen-time overload, it’s nice to get actual eye contact from a person when they speak to me.

2. Smile. When we are in pain constantly, it can be easy to have RGF (resting grump face). Next time you make eye contact with somebody, give them a little smile. It can change your day as much as it can change theirs.

3. Ask how they are doing. You might already be a pro at deflecting questions away from yourself to avoid thinking about your medical issues but that can also be a great way to show interest in another person.

The wonderful thing about becoming a person that makes another individual feel happy, cheerful, and important is that the energy will come back to you.

Happiness and kindness begets happiness and kindness. Kindness matters and that is important for a healthy, cheerful, and happy heart. “trvw

Jingle Bell Run Wrap-Up

Congratulations to Team Arthritis Introspective! Our nine teams raised a total of $12,250.15 during the Jingle Bell Run Season for the Arthritis Foundation.

Special shout outs to our top three teams:

1. Team Cupcake from Howard County raised $8103.15
2. Arthritis Introspective Greater Dallas raised $1867.00
3. Arthritis Introspective Runnergades from Greater Los Angeles raised $1170.00

Kudos to Our Top Five Fundraisers:

1. Nomi Stanton (Baltimore) $4053.00 Can you say Rock Star?! WTG Nomi!
2. Brenda Gordon (Fort Worth) $702.00
3. Haydee Sedlmeier (Los Angeles) $630.00
4. Jo Ann Segal (Fort Worth) $546.00
5. Sheila Harris (Baltimore) $435.00
Asking for Help–Part Two
by Susan Zimmerman

Susan Zimmerman co-leads the Tucson, AZ support group with Kevin Purcell. She holds a Masters in Master’s in rehab counseling and has lived with idiopathic rheumatoid arthritis for most of her life.

Since I underwent this revision surgery in January 2015, I have had two more joint replacement/revision surgeries. This past year my fiercely independent spirit was put to the test. I am extremely grateful for all of the help and support I have received. I am humbled and blessed that I have so many angels surrounding me. I know in my heart that if I only have the courage to ask for help in the future, my angels will once again fly by my side!

Lessons learned about asking for help:

Remember that some feel that helping others is truly a PRIVILEGE. By giving others the opportunity of helping you may, in turn, be offering them a gift of service which enhances their wellbeing and enriches their spirit. My friend always reminds me that allowing her to help me is my gift to her.

That makes everyone feel good! It takes courage to ask for help but sometimes asking one person for assistance can open the door for other friends to come to your side. Take a deep breath and go for it. More than likely you have helped that same person in some way without even knowing it.

Be ready for the “what do you need?” or “let me know if you need help?” response. Test the waters by asking if they are willing to call or text you on a weekly basis just to check on you. Be aware and sensitive to some friends/family who may be too overwhelmed with work, family, or their own health issues to be of service.

Be specific on what help or support you need. Sometimes friends and family don’t know HOW to help and need some guidance. Be ready to offer some suggestions like pick up my medication or mail, go to the store, or a ride to the doctor’s office.

Encourage and foster positive friendships in your life by connecting with friends on a regular basis. Social media makes it even easier to connect with others and maintain these positive friendships. Phone calls are the most personal and the most meaningful in my opinion.

Offer to be a “4 a.m. friend” who is willing at any time of day or night to be of service and offer support either by phone or in person. I think everyone needs to have at least one “4 a.m. friend” and if possible, offer to be that same kind of friend to others.

Get involved with the community. Consider joining an exercise group, book club, philanthropic organization, AI support group, or be active in a church. These are great places to meet others and form positive and supportive relationships.

Don’t forget to THANK those who have helped you. Send helpers a card, make a simple phone call, or for a more personal touch or make them cookies or take them to lunch if you can. Showing appreciation in whatever form you can is very important to continue to foster a mutually supportive friendship.

Try to be patient and understanding with family or friends who “just don’t get it”. Sometimes you need to help them understand how they can be helpful. My brother has been a great help since the beginning of the year. He even calls me when he will be in my neighborhood to ask if I need anything.

Consider investigating the ADA paratransit system in your town which provides transportation to people with disabilities who cannot access the bus system. I completed the eligibility process and now I can request rides at the cost of 3 dollars each way. Be aware that you do have to wait a while to be picked up or dropped off at your destination.
Walk to Cure Arthritis
by Haydee Sedlmeier

In addition to her responsibility as AI’s Vice President, Haydee serves as the Community Support Network Director and the West Los Angeles Outreach Relations Specialist. Her leadership and commitment to AI drives AI to unite young and middle-aged adults living with arthritis through wellness education, empowerment, and face to face support groups.

Artthritis Introspective (AI) is delighted to support the Arthritis Foundation’s Walk to Cure Arthritis this spring. We invite the extended AI family to register, fundraise and show our support for the arthritis community. The Arthritis Foundation is the Champion of Yes in the fight against arthritis and we are rallying together building teams, raising awareness and fundraising to move another step closer to finding a cure.

Artthritis Introspective invites you to rally your family, friends and coworkers to join their local Walk to Cure Arthritis as part of Team Arthritis Introspective! The participant registration process is straightforward. Once you are at your local Walk page, you will see options to start a team, join a team or join as an individual. (Forget about that individual stuff - we want you on Team Arthritis Introspective😊) Arthritis Introspective will appear in the Select a Group dropdown menu as an option. Please consider using either Arthritis Introspective or AI in your team name i.e., Arthritis Introspective Got Support. And yes we can have multiple teams under the AI group at events.

For those of us who physically cannot do the walking, we can still be Champions of Yes by joining a local team or joining our Artthritis Introspective Virtual Walkers team. If there is not an event in your local community, join our AI Virtual Walkers team.

If you already have a team and wish to connect it to Team Arthritis Introspective, no problem, email HSedlmeier@Arthritis.org with your Name, Team Name and which Walk you are registered for and we’ll work our magic.

Show your Team AI spirit and order our walk t-shirt from Cafepress. So let’s get started inviting friends, family and co-workers to join the Team Arthritis Introspective and fundraise. Visit www.walktocurearthritis.org to register and/or donate today!

AI Community Support Network
Connect, Empower, Educate by Haydee Sedlmeier

In our last edition, we announced the exciting news that Arthritis Introspective (AI) has joined the Arthritis Foundation family, as part of an expanding range of resources that provide help and support to people with all types of arthritis and related conditions.

Both Kevin and I are thrilled to be part of the Arthritis Foundation family. In 2016, we will see exciting growth and enhancements as we integrate the National Gathering Conference and Support Groups into the Arthritis Foundation. The programs that you have come to depend on and love will be enhanced while keeping true to our commitment to Connect, Educate and Empower- so that all of us thrive as people living with arthritis and rheumatic conditions.

At the heart of Arthritis Introspective are our peer-led and volunteer driven AI Support Groups that provide frequent educational and social activities and serve as a resource both for people living with arthritis and their loved ones. (We promise, no sitting in a circle complaining about how arthritis sucks while drinking stall coffee.)

Our awesome Outreach Relations Specialists (ORS) aka support group leaders are the heart and soul of the Community Support Network. Ideally, each Support Group is led by two AI trained co-leaders, usually meeting at least six meetings a year and the groups focus on issues that are important to you.

If you are interested in learning more about AI’s ORS training program and the tools we have to offer, please complete the ORS Application. Be a Champions of Yes, Become an ORS!
Spotlight On: Melissa Hafeli
by Nomi Harris

Nomi is an Outreach Relations Specialist for AI and the Program Coordinator for Girls on the Run of Central Maryland. She has a BA in English from Bradley University and a certificate in Clinical Mental Healthcare from UMUC. Nomi will be doing blogs for AI relating her own personal journey as an RA warrior in the hopes that you find yourself saying; "me, too".

Melissa Hafeli, a native of southeast Michigan, moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1995. She pursued her Master’s degree in Education at Vanderbilt University. She now is the Department’s Coordinator for Billing and Records for the Middle Tennessee region. Married in 2013 to the wonderful Manish Goradia, Melissa and Manish live in west Nashville. Melissa is looking forward to volunteering as the local chair for G9, and is excited to share her great city with everyone!

Melissa was diagnosed with JA at the age of 18 months old. I was immediately impressed and blown away when she said that her Mom was one of the "founding Mothers" of the American Juvenile Arthritis Association. That's pretty awesome; she explained that her folks felt that there was a need for something that wasn't there and so they took the initiative, with a few other folks, to get an organization together.

Melissa met Kevin, Haydee and the crew at a JA conference when she was a teen. She said she has a lot of respect for Kevin because while others were saying that there needed to be more for folks like us, no one was being proactive about it and Kevin took the reins and made it happen.

Her best piece of advice for someone has been newly diagnosed is to, when ready, try your best to seek out others that are like you because that support will make ALL the difference. Currently, Melissa works for the State of TN doing billing for those who provide services for folks with disabilities. As for being the local chair for the G9 conference in Nashville, when asked how she got that position, she simply said; "Kevin can be very persuasive."

She explained that the city is booming and that the hardest part of planning has been narrowing down things to do! She is very excited to show-off her city and make sure everyone has a wonderful time! Something folks might not know about her is that she is an avid hockey fan and has two furry children; Stevie and Blake.

Word Association Game
AI: AWESOME
Flare: Crappy
Best Medicine: Laughter
Chocolate: YUM

Awesome New Outreach Specialists
by Nomi Harris

Kirsten Shultz owns her own website, Not Standing Still's Disease, where she’s discusses thriving with multiple chronic illnesses. She volunteers with a number of organizations, including her local Arthritis Foundation. She also writes for Creaky Joints, one of the largest arthritis-based websites in the world, on self-love, self-care, relationships, and sex with chronic illnesses. Out of that has begun the #ChronicSex chat Thursday nights at 7 pm EST on Twitter.

I heard about AI a few years ago after a friend attended the national gathering, but I didn’t get involved for a while. After attending G8 in Milwaukee, which is close to where Kirsten lives, she figured that she had to go! It gave her the chance to meet up with some friends. Kirsten’s says,” I blog about living as a younger adults with multiple chronic illnesses and how that affects everything from our jobs to our sex lives. I have gotten some really nice feedback from that and been able to help others. I’m involved with the local Arthritis Foundation, too, and have enjoyed being able to help talk with parents about some of the things their kids may face, but there isn’t anything like that geared towards adults in my area. Being able to help people in person, especially with Deb, is all I could ask for.”

I asked Kirsten what little piece of advice that she would give to someone who is newly diagnosed, she said, "Educate yourself! There are many people that I encounter who know little or nothing about their illnesses and don’t understand why communication Continued on page 12
Awesome New Outreach Specialists
*Continued from page 11*

with physicians or being involved with their own care is so difficult. In order to be your own advocate, you really have to learn both what physicians may know and your own body. Knowing your own body will help you practice better self-love and self-care too, which is SO important to thriving with arthritis."

**Word Association Game:**
AI: Kevin’s jokes
Support: Best friends
Flare: The devil
Chocolate: Yes, please!

**Deb Constien** has had RA since she was 13 years old. She graduated from Mount Mary College with a double major in Dietetics and Biology. She’s a Board Chair for the Leadership Board of the Upper Midwest Region for the Arthritis Foundation 2 years and Board Member for 3 years. Deb is an Advocacy Chair and an Advocacy Ambassador for the Arthritis Foundation. She volunteers with Creaky Joints, Global Health Living Foundation and is a Representative for IFAA (International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis.

I saw AI advertised in the Arthritis Today magazine and had seen their annual trip listed and always wanted to attend as I fit the profile that they served. I went to the annual trip located in Milwaukee last year and was completely empowered, energized and felt it was a life changing group! In 33 years of having RA, I had never found a support group focused on me! It was so awesome meeting people just like me!! They could talk the talk and walk the walk just like I was!!

After finding AI, I knew that creating a support group in Madison was a must!!! I knew with Kirsten’s help we could serve this area ... Well!! The best piece of advice for a newly diagnosed person is to Educated, educate, educate. Find a support group of possible supportive loving people, of course... If possible! I would like people to know that I’ve had RA for 33 years, am crazy into advocacy and have had many complications due to RA, but this makes me stronger as my family is my life!!

**Word Association Game**
AI: Support group
Flare: Evil pain
Arthritis: Destruction and pain
Support Group: Friendly help

**Sarah Conway** would love to have a large group of people join and be able to do monthly support groups, events, and social activities. Having a place to talk, vent, learn, and share experiences can be very helpful thru the tough times. She also wants everyone to be able to create positive friendships and have fun exploring and enjoying San Diego!

Sarah Conway is 28 and just moved to San Diego with her husband and Yorkie puppy. She was diagnosed with RA 4½ years ago. She is doing her group in north San Diego and hopes to build a large group of people who can build a great relationship with one another. She wants everyone to feel comfortable and supported. Sarah discovered AI on Facebook and has been a member for 3 years. Something unique about her is she loves Disneyland!

**Word Association Game**
Chocolate: Yum!
Bedtime: When I start looking for comfy places to crash... lol

**Arthritis Introspective**
Thank you for being a part of Arthritis Introspective. We hope you enjoyed the winter 2016 newsletter. If you would like to receive more updates please register at ArthritisIntrospective.org
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