



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
on Spondyloarthritis

3 – 5 September
2026

Ghent, Belgium

**PRELIMINARY
PROGRAMME**

President

Atul Deodhar (USA)

Local Organising Committee

Dirk Elewaut (Belgium) and Filip Van den Bosch (Belgium)

Honorary Scientific Committee

Eric Veys (Belgium – Founder)

Herman Mielants (Belgium – Founder)

Paul Bowness (UK)

Jürgen Braun (Germany)

Maxime Breban (France)

Matthew Brown (UK)

Robert Colbert (USA)

Robert Inman (Canada)

Robert Landewé (The Netherlands)

Marjatta Leirisalo-Repo (Finland)

Jose A. Lopez de Castro (Spain)

Helena Marzo-Ortega (UK)

John Reveille (USA)

Martin Rudwaleit (Germany)

Georg Schett (Germany)

Jochen Sieper (Germany)

Désirée van der Heijde (The Netherlands)

David Yu (USA)

Scientific Committee

Xenofon Baraliakos (Germany)

Rubén Burgos Vargas (Mexico)

Francesco Ciccia (Italy)

Laura Coates (UK)

Félicie Costantino (France)

Maria-Antonietta D'Agostino (Italy)

Kurt de Vlam (Belgium)

Lianne S. Gensler (USA)

Eric Gracey (Belgium)

Nigil Haroon (Canada)

Rik Lories (Belgium)

Walter Maksymowych (Canada)

Sofia Ramiro (The Netherlands)

Percival Sampaio-Barros (Brazil)

Jose Scher (USA)

Lai-Shan Tam (PR China)

Ranjeny Thomas (Australia)

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is my great pleasure to invite you to the **15th International Congress on Spondyloarthritis**, which will take place at De Bijloke in Ghent from **3 to 5 September 2026**.

This remarkable venue, one of Ghent's historic hospitals and an architectural jewel of the city, offers an inspiring setting in the heart of the historic centre, within walking distance of most hotels.

Over the years, this congress has become a leading international meeting in the field of spondyloarthritis, bringing together scientists, clinicians, allied health professionals, industry representatives, and people living with these conditions from across the globe. The meeting is renowned for its high scientific standards, distinguished faculty, and stimulating multidisciplinary discussions.

The scientific programme will highlight the latest advances in clinical, translational, and basic research, imaging, and therapeutics in Spondyloarthritis. In addition, we are preparing sessions that will explore future directions in medicine and their potential impact on the understanding and management of these diseases.

A highlight of the congress will once again be the “Gent Oration,” dedicated to honouring a scientist or clinician internationally recognised for outstanding career contributions to the field. The organizing committee is delighted to nominate one of the most influential clinical researchers in the field of rheumatology – not simply in spondyloarthritis. Spanning last three decades, Désirée van der Heijde has single-handedly changed how we assess inflammatory arthritides – from development of ASAS20/40, ASDAS and scores of other clinical assessment tools in axSpA, to DAS28 and imaging assessment tools such as Sharp van der Heijde scores in rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis. We will hear from Désirée about her remarkable career and what she sees as her legacy.

Supporting and encouraging the next generation of SpA researchers remains one of the central goals of this congress. The programme will therefore include dedicated opportunities for networking, interactive poster discussions, and short oral presentations selected from top-ranked abstracts.

We also look forward to continuing our tradition of lively debate sessions addressing controversial topics in clinical science.

We hope this meeting will provide an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, strengthen collaborations, reconnect with colleagues and friends, and create new connections within the international SpA community.

I very much look forward to welcoming you to Ghent in September!

Yours sincerely,

Atul Deodhar,
President, International Congress on Spondyloarthritis

- 12.50 **Welcome Address**
Atul Deodhar, President
- 13.00 **Keynote lecture**
INV1 Artificial intelligence and big data in biomedical research & rheumatology
Yvan Saeys, Ghent, Belgium

Session 1: SpA disease mechanisms

- 13.45 **INV2 T cells in the pathogenesis of SpA**
Michael Paley, St. Louis, USA
- 14.05 **INV3 Interface inflammation, joints and spine**
Kristi Kuhn, Aurora, USA
- 14.25 **INV4 Enthesis biology and mechanical stress**
Eric Gracey, Ghent, Belgium

Discussion

15.00 Coffee Break & Poster Viewing

Session 2: SpA Genetics: HLA-B27 and Beyond

- 16.00 **INV5 Case closed: Has the arthritogenic peptide hypothesis finally won?**
Bob Colbert, Washington, USA
- 16.20 **INV6 SpA genetics beyond MHC class I**
Félicie Costantino, Versailles Saint Quentin, France
- 16.40 **INV7 Polygenic risk scores, where are we now?**
Matt Brown, London, UK

17.00 Discussion

Selected Oral Presentations I

- 17.15 **01 Deciphering the role of RUNX3 in human $\gamma\delta$ T-cell**
Maxime Melchior, Brussels, Belgium
- 17.25 **02 STK17B/DRAK2 enrichment in T cells links to treatment non-response in spondylo-arthritis**
Patricia Remalante-Rayco, Toronto, Canada
- 17.35 **03 Multi-omics profiling of gut tissue from early axial spondylo-arthritis patients reveals enrichment of public TRBV9⁺ CD8⁺ T cell clones with a type 17 signature**
Zuzanna Lukasik, Ghent, Belgium

17.45 Discussion

Session 3: Microbiome

- 18.00 **INV8 Microbiome therapy for spondyloarthritis**
Jeroen Raes, Leuven, Belgium

Session 4: Hands-On AI

- 18.30 **INV9 Tools and tricks for using AI in research**
Paras Karmacharya, Nashville, USA
- 19.00 Walking Dinner

Session 5: Psoriatic disease

08.30 **INV10** **A dermatologist's perspective of PsA**
Lluís Puig, Barcelona, Spain

08.50 **INV11** **Axial PsA vs. axial SpA**
Peter Nash, Brisbane, Australia

09.10 **INV12** **GLP-1 receptor agonists in inflammatory arthritis:
From metabolic risk to therapeutic opportunity**
Derin Karacabeyli, Vancouver, Canada

09.30 **Discussion**

09.45 Coffee Break & Poster Viewing

Session 6: Advancing drug development

10.45 **INV13** **Turning viruses into drugs**
Paul Peter Tak, Needham, USA

11.05 **INV14** **Engineering the biologics of the future**
Paul Parren, Leiden, The Netherlands

11.25 **INV15** **Emerging therapies across the spondyloarthritis spectrum**
Atul Deodhar, Portland, USA

11.45 **Discussion**

Selected Oral Presentations II

12.00 **04** **Early intervertebral bone formation precedes systemic inflammation in experimental arthritis: Evidence from X-ray phase contrast imaging**
Frank Verhoeven, Besançon, France

12.10 **05** **Drug-free remission in early peripheral spondyloarthritis: 10-year follow-up from the CRESPEA-trial**
Caroline Damen, Ghent, Belgium

12.20 **06** **No superiority of IL-17A inhibitors over TNF inhibitor cycling after first TNF inhibitor failure in axial spondyloarthritis: The ROC-SpA randomized trial**
Hubert Marotte, Saint-Étienne, France

12.30 **Discussion**

12.45 Lunch Break

13.45 **INV16** **The Ghent SpA Oration**
Désirée van der Heijde, Meerssen, The Netherlands

Selected Oral Presentations III

14.30 **07** **Defining an MRI indicative of axial spondyloarthritis in the sacroiliac joints of patients with axial spondyloarthritis: A data-driven and consensus-based framework of recommendations by the Spondyloarthritis Research and Treatment Network and the Society of Skeletal Radiology**
Walter Maksymowych, Edmonton, Canada

14.40 **08** **Early diagnosis of axial spondyloarthritis is associated with less long-term spinal structural damage: A longitudinal analysis of the Swiss Clinical Quality Management in Rheumatic Diseases Registry**
Annik Steimer, Zurich, Switzerland

14.50 **09** **2026 Update of the ASAS MRI definitions of sacroiliac joint involvement for classification of axial spondyloarthritis: Testing of the candidate lesions in the CLASSIC cohort**
Mikhail Protopopov, Berlin, Germany

15.00 **Discussion**

15.15 Coffee Break & Poster Viewing

Session 7: SpA imaging

- 16.00 **INV17** **Molecular imaging in SpA**
David Simon, Berlin, Germany
- 16.20 **INV18** **Technological advances in spine imaging**
Patrick Omoumi, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 16.40 **INV19** **The promise and peril of artificial intelligence - Will it make radiologists obsolete?**
Torsten Diekhoff, Rüdersdorf bei Berlin, Germany
- 17.00 Discussion
- 17.15 Scientific Committee Meeting
- 19.30 Gala Dinner at the Handelsbeurs

Session 8: Innovations in clinical trial methodology

- 08.30 **INV20** **Novel trial designs**
Laura Coates, Oxford, UK
- 08.50 **INV21** **Clinical trials as probes of disease pathogenesis**
Georg Schett, Erlangen, Germany
- 09.10 **INV22** **Lessons from the past for the clinical trials of the future**
Filip Van den Bosch, Ghent, Belgium
- 09.30 Discussion
- 09.45 Coffee Break & Poster Viewing
- Selected Oral Presentations IV
- 10.45 **O10** **Impact of a training program on the diagnostic suspicion of spondyloarthritis and psoriatic arthritis among Spanish A&E medical staff: The URGESPAR experience**
Carlos Guillén-Astete, Madrid, Spain
- 10.55 **O11** **A rare variant in the *Extl3* gene is associated with altered Wnt signaling pathway in a novel mouse model of axial spondyloarthritis**
Stéphane Hilliquin, Paris, France
- 11.05 **O12** **Multiomic and kinetic mapping identifies circulating monocytes committed to osteoclast fate and synovial tissue homing**
Joe Hutton, Cambridge, UK
- 11.15 **O13** ***EXTL3* mutation promotes pathological ossification in a chronic inflammatory context in ankylosing spondylitis**
Alix Calot, Paris, France
- 11.25 Discussion

11.45

The Grand Debate**Precision medicine is the only way forward in spondyloarthritis****INV23** For: Maria-Antonietta D'Agostino, Rome, Italy**INV24** Against: Robert Landewé, Meersen, The Netherlands

12.45

Closing Remarks

Atul Deodhar, President

Filip Van den Bosch and Dirk Elewaut, Local Organisers

13.00

Farewell Aperitif**Until 15/07****As of 16/07**

Participant MD	€ 650,00	€ 700,00
Student/researcher/non-MD with abstract	€ 450,00	€ 500,00
Industry Participant (sponsor)	€ 1000,00	€ 1100,00
Industry Participant (non-sponsor)	€ 2500,00	€ 2600,00
Congress Dinner on Friday 4 September	€ 95,00	€ 95,00

**Proof of status must be uploaded during the registration process.*

The registration fee includes:

- Access to all lectures
- Access to the exhibition
- Coffee breaks and lunches as mentioned in the programme
- Walking Dinner on Thursday 3 September
- Farewell Aperitif on Saturday 5 September

Participation into the Walking Dinner and the Farewell Aperitif is free but pre-registration is required. Separate registration and payment is required for the Congress Dinner on Friday 4 September.

Payment

Payment is to be made by credit card. Only VISA and MasterCard are accepted.

Cancellations

Cancellations received no later than 15 August, entitle registered persons to a 50% refund. In order to cancel your registration and/or hotel booking please contact Elise Laroy: elise@medicongress.com

A number of hotel rooms have been booked at special group rates, including breakfast and VAT.

The rates are available on the website (<https://spa-congress.org/hotelaccommodation>) and are only valid for reservations made through Medicongress. Housing requests are filled in order of receipt. If the hotel of your choice is filled, you will be assigned to another hotel.

Hotel availability cannot be guaranteed after August 15. Any requests for hotel accommodation must be accompanied by a credit card number, in order to secure the room. This credit card will not be charged by the organisers but only serves as a reservation guarantee. Participants will have to pay their hotel room and personal expenses at the reception of the hotel. In case of late cancellation or no show, the room will be charged on the credit card.

A hotel confirmation will be sent by email after receipt of the registration form and housing request and payment of the registration fee.

Venue

De Bijloke
Bijlokekaai 7
9000 Gent
<https://www.bijloke.be/>

De Bijloke is located in the city centre, within walking distance from the hotels.

Dates

Thursday 3 September – Saturday 5 September 2026

Language

The official congress language is English.

Exhibition

A medical exhibition is held on the occasion of the Congress. Access is free for registered participants. The exhibition is not accessible for non-MDs.

Catering

Coffee breaks and lunches will be served in the exhibition area.

WiFi

Free WiFi is offered to all participants and exhibitors. The WiFi access code will be available onsite.

Liability

Neither the organisers nor Medicongress accept liability for damages and/ or losses of any kind which may be incurred by Congress participants during the Congress. Participants are advised to take out insurance against loss, accidents or damage which could be incurred during the Congress. Organisation and Administration

Organisation and Administration

Medicongress Services

Noorwegenstraat 49
B-9940 Evergem, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)9 218 85 85
Email: spondylo@medicongress.com

medicongress
conference & association management

Platinum Sponsors

abbvie

Johnson & Johnson



Silver Sponsor

ALFASIGMA 

Bronze Sponsor

