

Scleroderma, literally meaning “hard skin,” is an autoimmune disorder characterized by thickening of the skin or organ tissues from excess production of collagen. Approximately 300,000 people in the United States have scleroderma, and women are four times as likely to be afflicted with the disease.

Scleroderma is divided into two categories: *localized* and *systemic*. *Localized scleroderma* is milder and affects the skin causing oval patches of inflamed skin and/or bands of thickened skin on the trunk or extremities. *Systemic scleroderma* can affect multiple organs including the heart, lungs, kidneys and intestines, causing disfigurement, disability, and organ failure. There is no cure for scleroderma, and because of its complexity and unpredictable course, care of scleroderma patients can be especially challenging.

Resources at Northwestern for Scleroderma

The Northwestern Scleroderma Program at the Feinberg School of Medicine provides comprehensive clinical evaluation and care for patients with scleroderma. Located in the Scleroderma Center at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, the clinical program includes experts from multiple disciplines including Rheumatology, Gastroenterology, Dermatology, Cardiology, and Vascular medicine, among others. These professionals work together to ensure integrated, comprehensive health care. Patients also

have the option of enrolling in clinical trials for drugs and diagnostic tools for scleroderma.

<http://www.nmh.org/nmh/home.htm>

Northwestern Physicians / Researchers Specializing in Scleroderma Treatment

The Scleroderma Research Program in the Division of Rheumatology features ongoing research exploring causes of and treatments for scleroderma. Research focuses on the pathogenesis of the disease, especially in the formation of scar tissue underlying the hardening of skin, lungs, intestinal tract, and blood vessels. The program maintains a “bench-to bedside” philosophy, which is upheld by close coordination between laboratory and clinical/translational research.

Physician profiles and clinic information:

http://www.nmff.org/findphysician/phys_earch.asp

<http://www.nmff.org/clinicaldepts/department.asp?id=28>

IWHR Highlighted Researcher

Dr. John Varga, MD is the John and Nancy Hughes Distinguished Professor of Rheumatology at the Feinberg School of Medicine and a physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. As Director of the Northwestern Scleroderma program, Dr. Varga's research is centered on development and evaluation of treatments for scleroderma and other related fibrotic dis-

eases, and on determining the genetic basis of the disease. Most recently, Dr. Varga is initiating clinical trials of novel drugs and interventions, some of which were discovered as a result of laboratory research performed at Northwestern. The ongoing clinical trials will reveal if such novel therapies are safe and effective in scleroderma patients.

Useful Links and Resources

http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Scleroderma/default.asp

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/scleroderma.html>

<http://www.srfcure.org/srf/home.htm>

<http://www.sclero.org/>

Upcoming conferences/ symposiums:

2008 Scleroderma Foundation National Patient Education Conference, July 25-27, Manhattan Beach, CA
http://www.scleroderma.org/national_conference.htm

2008 Stepping Out to Cure Scleroderma Walk, June 22, Highland Park, IL
<http://www.scleroderma.org/chapter/illinois/2008HighlandWalk.shtm>

Federal, state, and local organizations identify a number of health issues each month to bring to national attention. The Institute will focus on one of these topics each month.

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