Alexandre Sepriano
It was a great pleasure to serve as an ambassador in the 2018 EULAR/EMEUNET Ambassador Programme! I was expecting to connect with a group of young and enthusiastic group of first-time EULAR attendees to share some of my ‘strategies’ to deal with the (always) overwhelming experience of this congress. Also, I’m always keen to hear different views and opinions. That was exactly what it happened – i.e. nice and relaxed conversations with the mentees during the congress, starting in the first days and continuing during the congress and EMEUNET networking events. Taken all together, I could not recommend more this program, both to the ambassadors and mentees. What a memorable experience!
Javier Rodríguez-Carrio

It was a real pleasure to participate as an ambassador in the EULAR/EMEUNET Ambassador Programme for EULAR 2018. The programme is very well organised by our colleagues from the EMEUNET Working Group and it allows you to meet new colleagues from all over the world with shared research and professional interests. The contact with the first-time attendees is made some weeks before EULAR so that you can easily plan ahead to meet at the conference venue. We had an informal and very nice meeting together and also visit the posters of other colleagues. The ‘young colleague’ perspective is a hallmark of this programme and it promotes a relaxed and confident atmosphere for all of the participants. If you are travelling alone to the conference, or if it is the first time at an international conference, I can only recommend this initiative: you will be introduced to new colleagues, you will be offered to join other EMEUNET activities and, more importantly, you will have fun! Do not miss the opportunity for the next EULAR conference!
Mrinalini Dey
I am an Academic Foundation Year 2 Doctor in North West England, and will be starting an NIHR Academic Clinical Fellowship in Rheumatology in Mersey in August.

I chose to take part in the Ambassador programme as this was only my second year at EULAR, and, despite travelling with members of my faculty and presenting, I wanted to gain insights from a different senior rheumatologist, specialising in a different field to my current seniors, with interests perhaps more aligned to my own. I also saw it as an opportunity to meet others in the field, from across the world, and therefore increase my awareness of research in other places.

I met my Ambassador (Dr John Pauling) on the first day of the conference, which was very useful as he was able to provide invaluable advice on how to plan my time and recommended sessions. One problem I encountered was wanting to go to several sessions timetabled at the same time, so Dr Pauling was able to advise on which ones would be most suitable and the fact we could move between sessions. We planned to meet again at the EMEUNET social event on Thursday, although we did not manage this in the end. It was also insightful to find out about his work in Bath, given I have never worked or trained in that part of the UK.

I would definitely recommend this programme to others, particularly those who are travelling alone to EULAR or for whom this is the first time. It provides the opportunity to network with trainees of varying grades and from several countries, as well as getting useful tips from someone who has been attending the conference for many years. The meeting was very relaxed and informal, and would certainly remove any worries associated with attending conference for the first time or alone.
Simon Stones

It was a pleasure to be involved in the 2018 EULAR/EMEUNET Ambassador Programme as an ambassador, for what was my fourth EULAR Congress. I love attending the Congress each year, because you really do come away with a renewed sense of purpose and motivation for the year ahead. However, I remember how daunting and overwhelming I felt during my first EULAR Congress, hence why I wanted to try and support other first-time attendees to make the most of their time. The Programme started some weeks before the EULAR Congress virtually, starting off virtually. The EMEUNET Education Subgroup matched first-time attendees with ambassadors sharing similar professional interests and expertise. For example, I was flagged for qualitative research, health services research and patient education. I began the process by emailing the five individuals in my ambassador group, introducing myself, and asking everyone to introduce themselves. I also shared lots of information about the EULAR Congress (also discussed in a blog post that I published https://simonstones.com/2018/06/11/getting-the-most-from-the-eular-congress/), with some top tips which included:

- Planning sessions to attend before the Congress;
- Downloading the EULAR Congress mobile app;
- Signing up for poster tours on the days they were happening;
- Starting new conversations with different people in the room;
- The importance of taking breaks and engaging in informal networking;
- Setting aside time to explore the exhibition areas and the EULAR village;
- Making time to explore the City – after all, it’s good to have some time to unwind and reflect!

We also decided to create a closed WhatsApp message group to facilitate conversation during the Congress, as well as to make it easier for us to meet and to ask questions. We also decided to arrange to meet up during the Congress, which was difficult because of everyone’s competing arrangements. The group met in smaller numbers across the few days of the Congress, and four of us managed to meet for a selfie one day too!

Most people seemed to really enjoy the EULAR Congress and valued some of the insights before the Congress. The EULAR Congress is a brilliant event in the Rheumatology calendar, but I wanted to emphasise that individuals should tailor their experience to meet their needs – which does mean being selective in attending the sessions of most importance to you and your work, as well as viewing the posters that apply most to your work. If you are thinking of attending the EULAR Congress for the first time in the future, then I would highly recommend applying to join the EULAR/EMEUNET Ambassador Programme – the best way to learn is from those who have been in your shoes before!