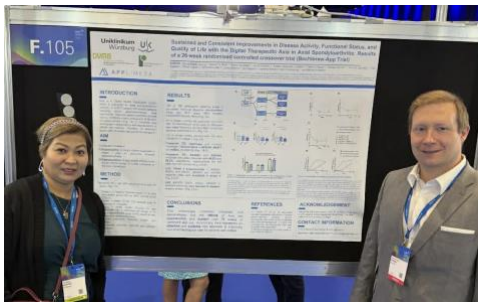
EULAR Congress 2026 Delegate Report

Geraldine M. Bonites
ASIF Trustee | EULAR PARE Delegate, Philippines



1. With Jo D and Jo L at ASIF's booth
2. At the EULAR PARE area
3. With Dr. Patrick-Pascal Strunz from University Hospital Würzburg (Germany), co-author of research on Axia
4. With APLAR's representatives Tom (Australia) and Dr. Yamaoka (Japan)
5. With Nadia and Andri, speakers for the *From Pain to Progress* session

Attending EULAR 2026 for the First Time

Attending EULAR 2026 in London was both a personal and professional milestone, providing an opportunity to represent the Philippine AxSpA community and contribute to international discussions on patient advocacy, research, and care. As a person living with non-radiographic axial spondyloarthritis (nr-axSpA), a patient advocate, and an ASIF Trustee, I was honoured to represent the Axial Spondyloarthritis International Federation (ASIF) and share the experiences and perspectives of people living with AxSpA in the Philippines at one of the world's largest rheumatology congresses.

The congress provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from leading experts, connect with patient advocates and healthcare professionals worldwide, and gather insights that can help strengthen AxSpA awareness, education, and advocacy efforts in the Philippines.

MY TOP 3 TAKEAWAYS FROM EULAR 2026

1. Earlier diagnosis changes lives
Reducing diagnostic delays remains one of the most important priorities in AxSpA care.

2. Patients must have a seat at the table
Meaningful patient involvement improves healthcare, research, and advocacy outcomes.

3. Innovation can support patient empowerment
Digital tools and AI offer exciting opportunities to improve education, self-management, and community engagement.

Key Learnings

One of the most impactful sessions I attended was *Healing Beyond Borders: Transforming Lives Through Inclusive Rheumatology Care*. Learning how several African countries have successfully improved care for people living with rheumatic diseases demonstrated that meaningful progress is possible even in settings with limited resources. The session offered practical ideas that could potentially be adapted in countries such as the Philippines.

I also attended several presentations and poster sessions focused on axial spondyloarthritis. Discussions with researchers highlighted ongoing efforts to improve early diagnosis through MRI findings and other diagnostic approaches. This topic resonated deeply with me because my own diagnosis was confirmed only in 2023 through MRI evidence after years of symptoms. These conversations reinforced the importance of raising awareness and reducing diagnostic delays for people living with AxSpA.

Another area of interest was digital health innovation. I learned about Axia, an app-based non-pharmacological intervention for AxSpA that has shown promising results in improving disease activity, function, and quality of life, highlighting the growing role of digital health in patient self-management. The concept inspired me to explore the future possibility of developing similar digital support tools tailored to the needs of AxSpA patients in the Philippines.

Patient Partnership and Advocacy

A significant highlight was attending the Global Remission Coalition Meeting, where discussions emphasized patient-centred care, shared decision-making, and the importance of involving patients as active partners in treatment decisions.

I also had the opportunity to meet representatives from the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) and discuss AxSpA advocacy and ASIF's International Map of Axial Spondyloarthritis (IMAP) Project. While APLAR does not currently have a formal patient partnership programme, it was encouraging to hear openness toward greater patient involvement in the future. Expanding patient engagement across the Asia-Pacific region has the potential to strengthen advocacy efforts and improve outcomes for people living with rheumatic diseases. These discussions also highlighted the important role that ASIF plays in connecting patient organizations and advocates globally to advance awareness, education, and support for people living with axial spondyloarthritis.

The EULAR PARE activities and networking opportunities were equally valuable. Meeting patient advocates from different countries reinforced the importance of international collaboration and knowledge sharing. Despite differences in healthcare systems and resources, many of the challenges faced by people living with AxSpA are remarkably similar across the world.

Exercise, Healthy Living, and Digital Innovation

One of the most inspiring sessions I attended was *From Pain to Progress: Encouraging Exercise and Healthy Living in AxSpA*, which featured fellow ASIF Trustees among the speakers. The session highlighted the importance of overcoming fear of movement, promoting physical activity, and supporting behavioral changes that improve long-term health outcomes.

A key message was that movement is not the enemy of pain. With appropriate support, education, and confidence-building, people living with AxSpA can improve function, maintain mobility, and enhance quality of life. Examples of successful community-based initiatives shared during the session provided useful ideas that may be adapted for future advocacy activities in the Philippines.

I also attended a session exploring the role of artificial intelligence in supporting people living with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. The discussion demonstrated how AI can help improve access to reliable information, support patient education, and strengthen advocacy efforts while ensuring that patients remain at the centre of care.

Throughout the congress, I had the opportunity to share the experiences and challenges faced by people living with AxSpA in the Philippines, particularly regarding delayed diagnosis, limited awareness, and access to care. These conversations helped raise awareness of the

Philippine patient perspective while also allowing me to learn from successful initiatives implemented in other countries. The exchange of experiences reinforced the value of global collaboration in addressing common challenges faced by the AxSpA community.

Looking Forward

My first EULAR Congress was an inspiring and empowering experience. It reinforced the importance of early diagnosis, patient partnership, physical activity, and digital innovation in improving outcomes for people living with AxSpA.

I return home with new knowledge, valuable connections, and fresh ideas that can help advance AxSpA awareness and advocacy in the Philippines. I am grateful to ASIF and EULAR PARE for providing opportunities for patient representatives to participate in global discussions and contribute to the future of rheumatology care.

The experience strengthened my commitment to ensuring that the voices of people living with axial spondyloarthritis continue to be heard and represented both nationally and internationally.

About the Author

Geraldine M. Bonites is an ASIF Trustee, EULAR PARE Delegate, and Trustee of the Axial Spondyloarthritis Association of the Philippines (ASAPh). She serves as a patient advocate working to improve awareness, early diagnosis, and support for people living with axial spondyloarthritis in the Philippines.