

She dedicates her life to fightingcrippler

By Katie Kerwin
staff writer

In the war against arthritis, the search for a cure is the main battle. But the Arthritis Foundation skirmishes daily with a slew of misconcep-

tions: that arthritis is a minor complaint; an excuse for gold-brickers; or affliction of only the elderly. The foundation conducts arthritis research, tries to help arthritics cope with the infirmity and attempts to educate non-arthritics to the problem.

Lynda Hubar, newly elected president of the Michigan chapter, knows how tough it is to get the public inflamed about the problems of arthritis. "We're not very dramatic. You don't die from arthritis," the West Bloomfield homemaker said. "We're not glamorous like cancer or heart disease. We're just everyday ache and pain. What do you do with us?"

rheumatoid arthritis, a more severe variety that can incapacitate and cripple. Mrs. Hubar, who has had rheumatoid arthritis for 20 years, became the first woman — and probably the first rheumatoid arthritic — to head the state chapter. The job, like most with the foundation, is volunteer. To Mrs. Hubar, the popular notion that arthritis is merely an uncomfortable stiffness of the joints is one of the foundation's biggest battles. Some forms, like osteoarthritis, can be fairly mild. However, rheumatoid arthritis

can affect internal organs and the whole body, creating instant pain and constant fatigue, Mrs. Hubar said. "You know how some days you wake up and feel like a wrung-out dishrag? That's how you feel all the time with rheumatoid arthritis. It's like a constant toothache all over your body. "It used to be crippling," she said. "But medical technology has come so far in the last decade that you don't see so many people in wheelchairs."

Surgery has repaired many of the gnarled joints and twisted fingers that formerly disfigured rheumatoid arthritis, she said. "You see so many almost bionic people walking around these days." Rheumatoid arthritis strikes more women than men, and usually those between the ages of 25 and 40, she said. The embarrassment of suffering from Mrs. Hubar said. "She didn't tell anyone she had arthritis. "I would have 4,000 excuses. When friends would say, 'What's wrong now?' I'd just say, 'Oh, I threw my back out,'" she said. "When everyone tells you it's an old folks' disease, you don't want to talk about it," she said. "It had a sort of stigma about it."

The pain would disappear sometimes, but it always returned. Arthritis occasionally left her bed-ridden and frequently interfered with her daily routine. "I couldn't work in the kitchen. Things fell through my hands. I can't tell you how many sets of dishes I've been through." After four years, she went to a rheumatologist. She grimaces now at the thought that she waited so long. "I guess it was really my own ignorance," she said. "Within a year and a half, I was back on my feet." Shopping, fixing dinner and dressing herself are all now possible.

"I still have trouble lifting grocery bags, but I can make a bed — just don't ask me to tuck anything in." Lifting a load of wet wash is still out of the question, she added. **THE SVELTE BLONDE** wears gold bangles on her slender wrists and numerous rings on slim, straight fingers. Without the thumb splint she must occasionally wear, no one would identify her as a sufferer of a severe form of arthritis. "Invisibility" of much arthritis creates another set of problems. Many arthritis sufferers don't look like they are seriously ill, Hubar said. A family may see an arthritic creeping around in the morning when the pain is almost unbearable, but by afternoon, the ache may be nearly gone. The observer may assume the morning's moans and groans were mere gold-bricking, she said.

Consulting for patients and their families is one of Hubar's priorities for the state chapter. The 5,000-member Michigan group, which was the organization's founding chapter 30 years ago, concentrates on educating the public and helping arthritics cope with the disease. Prompt medical treatment is stressed.

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