

Boston University Scleroderma Program



Research, Education &
Patient Care in Scleroderma

Boston University School of Medicine
Boston Medical Center

Boston University Scleroderma Program
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Scleroderma is an autoimmune disease affecting predominantly women and affecting individuals of all age ranges, including children. While the term “scleroderma” itself means “hard skin”, scleroderma can be a devastating disease, affecting the blood vessels, the lung, the heart, the kidneys, the intestinal tract and other key organs. The term “systemic sclerosis” is used to refer to the forms of the disease that affect internal organs as well as the skin. Localized scleroderma includes morphea and linear scleroderma, types of scleroderma that are limited to the skin and occur more often in children and young adults. Scleroderma is a member of a family of autoimmune diseases that include systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis and dermatomyositis. It affects approximately 250,000 individuals in the United States, with one quarter to one third of those having the more serious systemic forms of the disease.

Scleroderma itself means “hard skin”. The hardness is caused by increased production of collagen and other proteins that cause skin thickening and replace normal skin structures with scar tissue. The same process may occur in the lungs, in the heart and the gastrointestinal tract. At the same time, there is injury and destruction of blood vessels with impaired blood flow, most commonly seen in the fingers. The same process can involve blood flow to the kidneys, sometimes leading to kidney failure, and in the lungs, leading to pulmonary hypertension. Research over the last two decades has led to improved treatment modalities for scleroderma and has improved both survival and function for individuals with this disease. While this improvement is welcome, the fact is still that there is no cure and that individuals continue to be disabled and die from the disease.

We at Boston University Medical Center and other programs around the country are working to fight this devastating disease. The Boston University Scleroderma Program is directed by Dr. Joseph Korn and includes rheumatology faculty, faculty from other specialties including Pulmonary, Cardiology, PhD faculty who are involved in basic research, clinical trial nurse coordinators and administrative staff to help coordinate research and patient care.

Our work includes basic laboratory research aimed at better understanding the mechanisms leading to skin scarring, scarring of internal organs, and blood vessel injury and damage. We also act as a major referral center for scleroderma patients, an educational resource for physicians and patients throughout the country, and a liaison with pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to develop and test promising agents for the treatment and cure of scleroderma.

Additional information may be found at our website, <http://arthritis.bu.edu/scleroderma> or by calling (617) 638-4486.

Contributions to support our research programs may be made to:

Scleroderma Program
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