



## COMMON, BUT POORLY RECOGNIZED FORM OF ARTHRITIS ENDS CAREER OF MICHAEL SLATER

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Yesterday Michael Slater, respected test batsman for Australia, announced his retirement from first class cricket due to progression of a long-standing arthritic condition. According to media reports, Michael has two related disorders, ankylosing spondylitis and reactive arthritis. Ankylosing spondylitis (AS), the more common disorder, affects between 1 in 100 and 1 in 200 people yet awareness of this disorder in the community is poor.

AS is a form of arthritis that mainly affects the spine although in one-third of individuals other joints are involved such as the shoulders, hips and knees. People with AS commonly develop pain, stiffness and fatigue. In more severe cases, there is loss of mobility and ability to maintain employment.

**Dr Lionel Schachna**, director of the **Austin Spondylitis Centre**, says: *“Michael, like so many others with ankylosing spondylitis, has had a successful and productive career prematurely cut short by this disorder. With the advent of new treatments, loss of capacity to work should become the exception rather than the rule.”*

The **Austin Spondylitis Centre**, based at the **Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre**, is one of the few centres in Australia committed exclusively to the care and treatment of patients with AS. Dr Schachna is excited about the recent development of a new class of medications for AS called **anti-TNF therapy**. TNF (tumor necrosis factor) is a molecule that plays a critical role in development of AS. Anti-TNF therapy blocks the many effects of this molecule. *“Anti-TNF therapy is the first major breakthrough for ankylosing spondylitis since the development of anti-inflammatory medications in the 1970s. They are rapidly effective for almost all aspects of ankylosing spondylitis”*, Dr Schachna said.

The two major drawbacks of **anti-TNF therapy** are high cost and uncertain long-term side effects. Currently, **anti-TNF therapy** is available under the PBS only for those with severe rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn’s disease. It is hoped that this treatment will be available under the PBS for severe ankylosing spondylitis in late 2004.

**Dr Lionel Schachna, Rheumatologist and Director of the Austin Spondylitis Centre is available for interview/comment on mobile 0425 826 450 or (03) 9496 4045.**

**Further information about bone and joint specialists can be found at [www.rheumatology.org.au](http://www.rheumatology.org.au)**

If you would like to arrange an interview with a bone and joint specialists or additional information please contact Robyn Middleton on 02 9256 5458.

