Systemic sclerosis (SSc) is a debilitating, chronic autoimmune disease that causes the body’s immune system to attack its own tissue. The underlying cause is unknown and it is potentially fatal. There are two main types:

- **Limited Cutaneous** SSc was previously known as CREST syndrome – milder and affects the skin
- **Diffuse Cutaneous** SSc is more widespread on the skin and can affect internal organs

SSc is a rare disease and has a highly detrimental impact on the 2.5 million people it affects around the world. It affects adults aged 30-50 and is three to four times more likely to affect women than men. Any age group can be affected, but mainly occurs in adults aged 30-50. Prevalence varies widely across the world, but the reasons are unknown.

SSc can affect internal organs as well as the skin. SSc causes thickening of the skin and can disfigure the most publicly visible body parts such as the face and hands. It can cause potentially fatal damage to internal organs such as the heart and blood vessels, lungs, stomach and kidneys. SSc can impact life expectancy and quality of life. Averagely, survival for SSc is only around 11 years from diagnosis.

Symptoms can lead to dissatisfaction with body image, affect social relationships and significantly decrease quality of life. Up to 65% of people with SSc report symptoms of anxiety and depression.

There are currently no disease modifying treatment options approved for SSc. Management of the condition focuses on relief of symptoms, to prevent disease worsening and minimise disability. There is a significant need for an effective therapy that targets the underlying causes of the disease.

**References**