**S2 Fig:** DAG of causal mechanisms to identify potential sources of confounding

Inclusion period

**=**

Proxy treatment strategy

Earlier diagnosis

Earlier start DMARDs

Better first line DMARDs

Treat-to-target treatment adjustmentsa

Suppression disease activity

Shorter symptom duration and less inflammation at diagnosis

Mortality

SDFR

Functionality

Age

Genderb

a Increased DAS-scores are promptly followed by treatment adjustments. In case of failure of ≥2 conventional DMARDs biologics are allowed to achieve DAS-remission.

b Since age and gender are related to the outcome but not to the inclusion period, they are formally no confounders.