Rheumatology Department, Hammersmith Hospital: Creation of a Multidisciplinary Early Inflammatory Arthritis Service

SUMMARY

The Rheumatology Department at Hammersmith Hospital (HH) developed a Multidisciplinary Early Inflammatory Arthritis (EIA) service to improve the quality of service and outcomes for patients with suspected EIA. Specifically, this service aimed to improve assessment, treatment initiation, education and self-management, and disease control, in accordance with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Quality Standard GS53 statements.

THE CHALLENGE

- People with EIA require urgent, intensive treatment to prevent chronic pain and disability.
- The Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust rheumatology service based at Hammersmith Hospital, Paddington, London, did not meet the NICE Quality Standard GS53 statements in the 2014/15 period. British Society for Rheumatology (BSR) National Clinical Audit for EIA (<5% of EIA patients [cross-site] were seen within three weeks of GP referral and led to an appointment within 45 days (14 patients).)

NICE GS53 Statements:
- Referral (within 3 days of presentation)
- Assessment (within 3 weeks of referral)
- Treatment initiation (within 6 weeks of referral)
- Education and self-management (within 1 month of diagnosis)
- Disease control (monthly escalation)
- Rapid access to advice
- Annual review

THE SOLUTION

- The Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust rheumatology service developed a new multidisciplinary EIA service pathway (Figure 1, Figure 2), by establishing a cross-site multidisciplinary rheumatology working group to explore the reasons underlying the Trust’s previous poor performance and to agree on an improvement strategy.

- The EIA service applies early medical review, which streamlines the GP referral-to-assessment process to within three weeks (Figure 1).

- Key steps in this pathway include:
  - Dedicated ‘Choose and Book’ slots on e-referral system
  - A named EIA pathway coordinator to align patient appointments and investigations
  - A one-hour, weekly multidisciplinary team meeting (MDT)
  - BHA ‘new patient’ only slots that are never cancelled
  - Patient recruitment into research studies
  - EIA-diagnosed patients join the disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD) titration pathway (Figure 2)

- The one-year model totalled costs for the new EIA service compared to Consultation Service was £44,668/year (additional costs arise from the personnel involved in provision of the EIA service: increased number of consultant and Band 7 nurse clinicians, and additional Band 4 administrator, and weekly MDT) and 67% in the long-term.

- Biologic therapy: 50% (2/4) of high-disease activity patients at time of diagnosis and treatment before starting.

- In between nurse clinic appointments, all EIA patients are given access to a nurse-led advice service (Figure 2).

- The nurse clinic appointments support holistic patient treatment and enable nurses to build relationships with their patients, which helps nurses to understand their patients’ needs (Figure 2).

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- EIA-clinic (consultant and nurse-led) are never cancelled.

- Over the next six months, the rheumatology service at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust plans to replicate the service at the second site, St Mary’s Hospital.

- The EIA service pathway model has been presented at North West London regional meetings and interest in setting up a similar EIA service has since been expressed by a local Trust.

PATIENT FOCUS AND SATISFACTION

- Three NNAS-nominated local patient representatives were involved in the initial stakeholder consultations regarding the design of the new service, the process and patient materials were modified based on their suggestions.

- The pathway is adjusted via a flexible, iterative process based on continuous quality improvement and patient feedback.

- The length and number of nurse clinic appointments enable patients and nurses to get to know each other and allows nurses to provide support that is tailored to the individual needs of their patients.

- The online system that provides access to test results may help empower patients to feel in control of their own treatment.

INNOVATIVE APPROACH AND SCALABILITY

- Dedicated ‘Choose and Book’ ERS slots can only be booked three weeks in advance, which avoids delays in obtaining first appointments and ensures that these slots are actively triaged by senior consultants.

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Feedback that has been received electronically from patients has been positive:

- “The team helped me to understand and manage my disease in a positive way without scaring me... I always found my questions and always had someone that cares about my concerns and listen(1)!”

- “All the medical staff we have met have been kind and willing to help, so we are most grateful.”

- “My husband and I would like to thank HH. We were in extreme joint pain, and we tried without success to get an urgent appointment within our local health trust. Fortunately, we were referred to the HH and seen very quickly.”

References

5. BSR Best Practice Awards 2017–18 in Rheumatology and Musculoskeletal Health