SUMMARY
The Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Programme, developed and employed in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) with academic links to Glasgow Caledonian University, is a one-year training programme for nurses with an interest in moving into a permanent rheumatology clinical nurse specialist (CNS) post. Rheumatology CNSs are highly skilled members of the multidisciplinary team, providing support with tasks that reduce burden on doctors and ultimately improve patient care.

THE CHALLENGE
- The Scottish Public Health Network Report (ScotPHN, 2012): Highlighted that a lack of succession planning for CNS posts posed a significant risk to the further resilience and sustainability of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) services.
- A Commissioning for Quality in RA Patient Survey (conducted in NHSGGC, 2012): Identified an unmet patient need when only 57% of survey respondents felt that they could get help quickly during a flare.
- A review of CNS posts (found that conducted in NHSGGC, 2014): Many CNSs are senior (a number of whom are estimated to retire in the next five years) and have a wealth of experience.
- The rheumatology services on the different sites are therefore heavily reliant on existing rheumatology CNSs.
- Recruiting nurses into CNS roles in a speciality that is largely outpatient based was also recognised as a significant issue.
- Additionally, it takes time to acquire the skills to undertake such a role and a complex specialty with an expanding array of therapies.

THE SOLUTION
- The Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Programme in NHSGGC, 2012: Identified an unmet patient need when only 57% of survey respondents felt that they could get help quickly during a flare.
- A review of CNS posts (found that conducted in NHSGGC, 2014): Many CNSs are senior (a number of whom are estimated to retire in the next five years) and have a wealth of experience.
- The rheumatology services on the different sites are therefore heavily reliant on existing rheumatology CNSs.
- Recruiting nurses into CNS roles in a speciality that is largely outpatient based was also recognised as a significant issue.
- Additionally, it takes time to acquire the skills to undertake such a role and a complex specialty with an expanding array of therapies.

Figure 1. NHSGGC Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Units and Rotation Periods

Figure 2. Training Opportunities During the Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Programme

Table 1. Benefits of New CNS Posts to Hospitals in NHSGGC

SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES
Service Outcomes
- Two previous students who undertook the Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Programme post are now substantive rheumatology CNSs.
- There has been a rising number of high quality applicants from an increasing range of backgrounds.
- As a result of new CNS posts in hospitals, a number of benefits have been recognised (Table 1).

INNOVATIVE APPROACH AND SCALABILITY
- This is the first time a rheumatology nurse specialist training post has been established in NHS Scotland. The training programme exposes nurses to a range of opportunities (Figure 2) and is unique for the following reasons:
  - Focus and commitment to attracting nurses to the programme before they begin, or acquire, substantial experience in rheumatology.
  - Apprenticeship nature of the course, where importance is placed on providing students with hands-on clinical experience and the opportunity to work directly with experienced rheumatology CNSs and consultants.
  - Following presentation of an overview of the programme, its rationale and methodology, at the Scottish Society for Rheumatology meeting in October 2017, enquiries were received from three Health Boards in Scotland (NHS Fife, NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Grampian), that are interested in establishing similar training programmes.

PATIENT FOCUS AND SATISFACTION
- The Associate Rheumatology Nurse Specialist Training Programme in NHSGGC was established with the needs of patients in mind, which were recognised through the results of the Commissioning for Quality in RA Patient Survey conducted in NHSGGC in 2012.

Feedback from patients who used patient telephone helplines that are run by the rheumatology CNS include:
- "The nursing staff are a godsend when everything else is going wrong."
- "There is always a kind, calm voice at the end of the phone."
- "Cheers me up while helping me."

REFERENCES