PREGNANCY AND ARTHRITIS - A PATIENT EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN IRELAND  

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Background: The relationship between pregnancy and arthritis is a complex one. Because of the variability of arthritic conditions, it is important for patients to get advice from their doctor or a specialist nurse before trying for a baby. There can be implications for medication regimes, while the pregnancy itself can also affect the inflammatory arthritis. In the postpartum period, other considerations include breastfeeding and the frequent return of flares. Through this education programme, Arthritis Ireland developed information resources primarily targeting women of child-bearing age. The multichannel campaign provided information about the wide range of issues of concern to women with inflammatory arthritis who are planning a family or are pregnant.

Objectives:  
• To provide information and increase awareness around inflammatory arthritis and pregnancy;  
• To support women living with inflammatory arthritis through their illness and life journey;  
• To increase awareness of the work of Arthritis Ireland as a patient organisation.

Methods: In developing and executing this education programme, Arthritis Ireland worked extensively with a team of healthcare professionals, who are regarded internationally as leaders in this field. A multi-channel approach was taken to the development, production and dissemination of information, with public information events, literature and a suite of videos developed.

Up to this point, there had not been any Irish-produced material on this subject. The topic was seen to be an important one and an issue of significant public health interest.

The series of information talks on pregnancy and inflammatory arthritis was delivered by consultant rheumatologists and were held in cities around Ireland. The information booklet covered topics such as planning for a baby, medication and pregnancy, the role of the father, fertility, genetics, during the pregnancy, and after the pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Video was seen to be central to the success of the campaign. Working with the expert healthcare team, six information videos were developed around obstetrics, rheumatology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. The videos were published and promoted across Arthritis Ireland’s social media channels and were viewed by patients worldwide.

The capstone video featured a young mother who was diagnosed with JIA when she was two. Her story was an incredibly powerful testimony of overcoming and dealing with adversity and complex health issues.

Results: This educational campaign was developed to meet a significant need in the health information landscape. While there are no little resources produced focusing on pregnancy and parenting, there wasn’t anything in Ireland which specifically addressed the needs of women and men with inflammatory arthritis who are looking to have a family. The materials produced are a valuable tool in Arthritis Ireland’s canon of patient education materials.

Conclusion: It is anticipated that the materials developed will have a long lifespan and will support prospective parents for several years to come. Central to the success of the project was the involvement of the expert healthcare teams. Their commitment to the project spoke volumes of its importance and the considerable needs that were clearly communicated in Ireland, which the project provided.

Ultimately, Arthritis Ireland has produced a suite of resources which will be referenced and used by patients, and will hopefully make a considerable impact on their quality of life.

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