Non-pharmacologic topics relevant for clinical research in rheumatic diseases: the patient perspective

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Background: The research approach on Rheumatic diseases (RDs) is challenging and patient involvement as partners in medical research is an emerging force to obtain relevant information and to add unique skills, values and experiences to research. Despite growing interest in non-pharmacologic aspects of clinical research in RDs, the patients’ perspective is currently poorly explored.

Objectives: To identify and rank the priorities for clinical research according to patients’ perspective.

Methods: A structured face-to-face meeting between physicians and a patient representative was convened to list the non-pharmacologic topics relevant to RD patients. A cross-sectional no-profit on-line anonymous survey was devised to evaluate opinions of RD patients. They were asked to rate the following topics: food/nutrition, air pollution, smoking, work activity, environmental pollution, stress, physical activity, emotional well-being/stress, alternative medicine, and patient-physician relationship. Moreover, patients were asked to explain for which reason a topic was considered important (disease prevention, halting disease progression, symptoms control and disease cure). The survey was disseminated by ALOMAR (Lombard Association for Rheumatic Diseases) between June and October 2019.

Results: 200 rheumatic patients completed the survey: 130 inflammatory arthriti,
50 connective tissue diseases/vasculitis, and 20 among osteoarthritis, gout, condrocalcinosis, polymyalgia and primary fibromyalgia. Respondents were 178 females with median age of 50 years and median disease duration of 7 years. Among the nine topics identified, the one most rated by patients was the doctor-patient relationship; 188 (94%) of respondents considered this topic very or extremely important (see table below). In descending order, patients rated very or extremely important: psychological well-being/stress 185 (92.5%), physical activity 155 (77.5%), nutrition, eating habits and alcohol 150 (75%), alternative therapies 144 (72%), work activity 144 (72%), environmental pollution 134 (67%), social life 121 (60.5%) and cigarette smoke 119 (59.5%). The topics considered relevant were perceived to be able to influence disease symptoms. Regarding RD prevention, environmental pollution and cigarette smoking were considered the most important topics, while fewer patients believed that research on other topics could help to stop disease progression or to achieve disease healing.

Table 1 - Results of the surveys, across different countries, concerning patient perspective on the efficacy and risks of glucocorticoids in patients with RA.

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Conclusion: This survey highlights the relevance of several unmet needs. The holistic approach, in terms of medical consultation and psychological well-being, is considered the most important component able to influence disease perception. By capturing patient opinions on non-pharmacological topics for clinical research, this survey indicates that the active patient involvement is essential to design successful translational studies and improve clinical outcomes.

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PATIENTS’ EXPERIENCE OF INVOLVEMENT IN A RHEUMATOLOGY OUTPATIENT CLINIC

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Background: Involvement in own treatment and care is a wish from patients and a vision from politicians in Denmark. (1,2) In outpatient rheumatology patient involvement also leads to increased patient satisfaction, better quality of treatment and better utilization of resources in health care. (3,4,5) On the basis of this study we ought to involve our patients at our Outpatient Clinic in Svendborg, but are we?

Objectives: To gain knowledge about how patients with rheumatoid arthritis experience involvement in treatment and care in the Rheumatology Outpatient Clinic, Svendborg.

Methods: An interview study of six patients with subsequent analysis based on Ricoeur. (6) Patient inclusion: patients with rheumatoid arthritis in remission by DAS28 for more than 2 years. The participants elected were 3 males and 3 female at the age of 30 – 78 visiting the clinic during Marts and April 2019. They were asked about their experience of involvement from time of diagnosis until present time.

Results: The study provided knowledge that patient involvement was new to the participants. This is also found in other literature about patient involvement. (7,8) All participants in this study felt involved in own care and treatment. The involvement was based on being seen and heard as persons with individual needs and not just as patients with arthritis. The way the participants experienced involvement showed that there are individual differences in how to provide the experience. In order to clarify what involvement meant for each patient, relationship with the health professional was necessary, as other studies also shows. (7,9) The relationship was conditioned by continuity, trust, care and mutual respect. For all the participants informed consent was equal to involvement. Disease activity or fear of this was the main reason for feeling involved this way. Literature describes the same: amongst other factors, the severity of the disease is significant for the patients desire to be involved. (7,8)

Conclusion: The participants experienced involvement in own care and treatment. The relation to the health professional was important providing this experience. All defined involvement as informed consent as it also is to many healthcare professionals. (9) All participants needed time to reflect on what...