

# Implementing a patient-initiated clinic for people with rheumatoid arthritis: a qualitative evaluation.

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## Background

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a long term condition causing unpredictable episodes of pain and disability. Management of RA in secondary care is traditionally undertaken by regular clinician-driven reviews. These are often when the patient is well. Conversely if the patient experiences a disease flare-up they may be unable to see a specialist for many months. This results in a mismatch between clinical need and input.

Based on previous research findings, a patient-initiated review system called Direct Access (DA) was implemented for people with RA by Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust. This involved an education session for patients about the new system, a telephone helpline and access to a specialist review within 10 working days.

## Aim

To explore the experiences of patients and staff of a DA system to understand the process of implementation.

## Methods

- Observation of patient education sessions
- Semi-structured interviews with patients (n=23) and staff (n=7)
- Thematic analysis identified four key themes.

## Staff

*"the feedback I've had has been mainly extremely positive and in most cases they are delighted with the service..."*

*"..a great concept for patients who have stable rheumatoid who've got a specific disease related problem are able to ring up and get an appointment sorted out very quickly...I think that works really, really well and that's what it's designed for"*

*"...I've had some who have admitted their disease has got worse but have done nothing about it and some of these patients now I feel shouldn't have gone into DA."*

*"I'm getting more direct access patients and they come with more active, complex problems perhaps more than one problem. I am realising that a 15 minute routine follow-up slot perhaps isn't long enough to address all the issues."*

**Building patient confidence**

**Right place, right time**

**Safety**

**The everyday challenges of managing change**

## Patients

*"I trust [the nurse], I've known her a long, long time and I trust her implicitly."*

*"..I've got to catch 2 buses which takes about an hour and a half to see a consultant for about 5 minutes, which in my estimation, is a complete waste of time unless something is wrong with me."*

*"I don't say it's good for everyone because some people do get very confused you know about different things."*

*"..I was a bit nervous really thinking oh if I'm not going to get to see somebody regularly..."*

## Conclusions:

Direct Access for people with RA:

- Increases patient autonomy and is a more person-centred approach
- Is not appropriate for everyone
- May be a suitable system for the secondary care follow-up of people with other long term conditions.

**NHS**

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