

Arthritis patients want more psychological and emotional support

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New research from UWE Bristol has found a high demand for help to cope with the social and emotional implications of inflammatory arthritis among patients. The study, which will be presented at Rheumatology 2014 this month, found that patients need more support to deal with the impact of long term pain and tiredness.

The research suggested a need for psychological support from diagnosis onwards, with almost every patient wanting support (97%) and suggesting they would use psychological support services (96%). Despite this, less than a quarter (23%) had been asked about social and emotional issues by a [rheumatology](#) professional, suggesting there is a gap between the support provided and the support [patients](#) need.

Conducted with funding and support from Arthritis Research UK, the research surveyed 1,200 patients' opinions on the support currently available and their preferences for the type of services they would like to see in the future. Of those patients surveyed, only a small minority (6%) felt that social and emotional issues were irrelevant to their condition.

Inflammatory arthritis causes inflammation of the joints which leads to joint damage, stiffness and pain. These symptoms can cause patients to become depressed, fatigued, anxious and distressed. To support them in overcoming these issues, patients suggested they would like to access face-to-face support with a rheumatology specialist or a GP as needed.

If available, two thirds of patients would be interested in attending self-

management or coping clinics. Other services that patients would use to help them cope with their condition included peer support groups, pain management and patient education. Patients also said they needed more support for practical aspects such as the effects of their arthritis on work, leisure and relationships. Many people with these conditions are of working age and could get back to work with help from health professionals in the rheumatology team.

Lead researcher Dr Emma Dures said, "Patients have told us that psychological and emotional support is important and they would like help from rheumatology specialists to cope with the impact of living with arthritis. Therefore our research will now focus on supporting teams to acquire the skills and resources necessary to provide psychological and [emotional support](#) to improve quality of life for patients."

The British Society for Rheumatology's guideline for the management of rheumatoid arthritis states: "Effective care, treatment and support should be available for all patients with RA... Psychological and social support is an important aspect of management. Real and potential psychological distress should be addressed through the multidisciplinary team and appropriate agencies."

President of the British Society for Rheumatology Dr Chris Deighton said, "It can be physically and emotionally distressing for patients who develop an [inflammatory arthritis](#). There is clearly a huge unmet need for people with inflammatory arthritis, and more psychological support would improve the quality of their lives. All rheumatology services should provide access to professional psychological support."

Provided by University of the West of England

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