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Study examines opioid use in patients with rheumatoid arthritis

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A new analysis indicates that the use of opioid pain medications in older US rheumatoid arthritis patients peaked in 2010 and is now declining slightly. By 2014, 41% of rheumatoid arthritis patients were regular opioid users.

In the analysis of 2006-2014 Medicare data on 70,929 rheumatoid arthritis patients, the most commonly received opioids were hydrocodone and propoxyphene. Regular opioid use increased slowly, peaked in 2010 and decreased following withdrawal of propoxyphene. Hydrocodone and tramadol use increased commensurately, and overall opioid use declined only slightly. Factors associated with regular opioid use included younger age, female sex, black race, back pain, fibromyalgia, anxiety, and depression.

The *Arthritis & Rheumatology* findings point to substantial use of opioids in an older rheumatoid arthritis patients despite societal concerns regarding potential over-prescribing and addiction in recent years.

More information: Jeffrey R Curtis et al, Changing Trends in Opioid Use among U.S. Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients, *Arthritis & Rheumatology* (2017). DOI: 10.1002/art.40152

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