



Stories of change

THE WAITING RHEUM PROJECT: SUPPORTING SELF MANAGEMENT IN BELFAST

Using information events to improve the health and wellbeing of patients whilst they wait to be seen by the Belfast Trust rheumatology service.



What we did

We set up a Quality Improvement Project involving the wider Belfast Trust rheumatology team, Versus Arthritis and patient representatives. The project tested out various ideas designed to motivate patients on our waiting list to register for self-management support whilst they wait to be seen. Our change ideas including writing out to patients and telling them about our waiting list and endorsing resources available in the community, enclosing eye-catching posters, producing multi-disciplinary information videos, running online Information Events (in conjunction with Versus Arthritis and patient representation) and communicating with patients by text message.

Our motivation

We have an extensive waiting list and due to demand outstripping capacity, we are unable to see new patients that aren't urgent. As such many of the people on our waiting list are living with pain and potentially worsening conditions. We recognised that Versus Arthritis provide self-management resources which could hugely benefit people whilst they wait.

The difference we are making

To date 76 people on our waiting list have registered with Versus Arthritis to participate in one of their chronic pain self-management courses.

"Great to learn what support is available through Versus Arthritis."

"Was such a help to know that I wasn't alone with some of the symptoms".

"A lot of useful information.. easy to understand what was said today."

What's next?

We've identified that our multi-disciplinary Information Events have been the most effective way to motivate people to register with Versus Arthritis, however their delivery is quite resource intensive. To make best use of staff time we've recently recorded one of our Events and plan to use it in conjunction with a live Q&A session at the end. .





MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

We initially wrote out to our longest waiters and as there was a very muted response, we tried to grab their attention with colourful inserts. This didn't really make much difference, so we developed a series of information videos which we included as hyperlinks within our letter (check out: <https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/rheumatology/>). These took some time to produce and whilst there is no indication that they resulted in an upturn in self-management referral we feel they are a useful set of resources for any patient waiting to be seen by the rheumatology service. It wasn't until we decided to run Information Events that we started to see people referring for self-management. The Information Events are currently online only, due to the pandemic, and last for one hour. Various members of the rheumatology service participate, and attendees get to hear what to expect when they are seen by the service (most likely only a diagnosis with no medical management). They also receive self-management advice from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Versus Arthritis have a slot to promote their resources and a patient, who has benefitted from self-management, tells their story in a bid to convince the sceptics! Our biggest challenge has been the administrative burden of the project. Along our journey we decided to try out the Envoy App text messaging service, instead of writing out to people, and this has been a game changer in terms of cost savings. We also realised part way through that we needed to have a shared understanding with our partner Versus Arthritis, especially with respect to availability of self-management resources and data collection/ sharing. We dealt with this via an informal joint working agreement. Despite all our efforts to motivate people to adopt self-management, the return has been relatively low. This can at times be a bit disheartening, but we recognise for the small numbers that do sign up, the difference for them can be life changing.

**VERSUS
ARTHRITIS**

“Having health care professionals work in partnership with Versus Arthritis to reinforce the same message, that self-management can be highly effective, has been key.”




Top tips

- Test out different ideas sequentially and start small.
- Text messaging, over letters, has been much more efficient and effective at engaging with people
- Don't be afraid to overbook your Information events.
- Develop a working agreement with your partners.

Want to know more?

Check out our [Quality Improvement Project Poster](#) to find out more about our methodology, results and key learning



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