

The benefits of advanced practice physiotherapy-led triage in an acute rheumatology setting for Inflammatory Back Pain

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Background

Inflammatory Back Pain (IBP) is a multi-joint, autoimmune condition, associated with high levels of pain, disability, unemployment and morbidity. Time from symptom onset to diagnosis is up to 8 years in Ireland (ASRI, 2021). A significant delay in this pathway is many people wait several years for consultant appointments. To allow earlier patient access to rheumatology services a Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist (CSP) led Early IBP pathway was created, with consultant support

Methodology

A Quality Improvement project for an Advanced Practice Physiotherapy led Early IBP clinic was undertaken. Analysis of patient wait times, consultant involvement in clinical decision making and clinical outcomes was recorded

Conclusion

This evaluation of a Physiotherapy-led EIBP service demonstrates that:

- A clinical specialist physiotherapist can competently work at an advanced practice level in high complexity clinics, with patients likely to have an IBP diagnosis
- Enables greater numbers of patients to be seen in clinics with consultant input therefore increasing clinical capacity and allowing easier access to specialised
- On the day rehabilitation advice and education regarding their condition prior to a full physiotherapy appointment
- Recent changes to legislation allowing physiotherapists to order investigations, such as ionising radiation, will look to optimise the efficiency of the clinics
- Furthermore, a non-medical prescribing opportunity for appropriately trained allied health and social care professions, as available in other jurisdictions, will also help to optimise consultant run clinics



Aims

The purposes of this initiative was to:

- establish numbers of patients seen by the clinical specialist physiotherapist in a consultant clinic,
- Reduce appointment wait times to under 6 weeks, the international gold standard,
- Asses the benefits to the rheumatology service of advanced practice physiotherapy

Results

In four months 51 new patients were seen through the Early IBP pathway. Average waiting time was 40 weeks. A Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist saw 59% (n=30) of those new patients. Of those seen 10% (n=3) were discharged on the day, 53% (n=16) were diagnosed with inflammatory back pain, while 37% (n=11) required further investigations. Consultant discussion took place regarding all patients' care, as would happen with a Non Consultant Hospital Doctor (NCHD)

Early IBP Clinic Outcomes

