MANCHESTER 1824

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Identifying Key Variables for Inclusion in a Smartphone App to Support Clinical Care and Research in Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Background

Treatment for patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is guided by monitoring changes in disease severity.

At present, patients do not routinely record disease severity between clinic visits.

The REMORA study (**RE**mote **MO**nitoring in **R**heumatoid **A**rthritis) is designing, building and evaluating a smartphone app to collect electronic patient reported outcomes (ePROs).

Results

What to record

All of the stakeholders (patients, practitioners and researchers) wanted to capture information on changes in disease activity and the impact of the disease (physically and emotionally). However, patients wanted to record additional information to give greater context, such as the kind of day or week they were having. This was considered important information to understand the changes in symptom control.

ePROs relating to disease severity will be collected directly from patients on a routine basis.

These data will then linked to the electronic patient record (EPR) and a research database.



Aims

To determine:

- Which ePROS and other data relating to disease activity should be included in the app [**what** to record]
- The frequency with which these data should be captured [when to record] Ο
- How these data should be captured (e.g. numeric data, free text diary) [how to record]

When and how to record

- Practitioners and researchers wanted ePROs relating to disease activity and their impact on patients to be recorded regularly using existing validated tools. However, they could see the value of patients recording 'ad hoc' events. (such as triggers of disease activity) in the form of free text.
- Patients mainly suggested recording 'notable events' (such as flares) as they occurred in free text format. However, they could understand how the routine recording of symptoms could be beneficial for clinical consultations and self-management.

The final app therefore comprised :

ePROs to be recorded on a regular basis in numeric format (which were linked to the EPR) Ο • a free text diary (for patient use)

| Final data set sowing frequency of recording, question sets and mode of data captureDailyPain Difficulty with physical activities Fatigue Sleep difficulties Physical wellbeing Emotional wellbeing Coping10 point visual analogue scaleWeeklyNumber of tender joints Number of swollen jointsFixed 7 point scale (radio button)Morning stiffnessNumeric valueImage: Physical assessment of wellbeing CopingPres/No response (radio button)Image: Physical assessment of wellbeing Impact on hours workedPres/No response (radio button)Image: Physical analogue ScalePres/No response (radio button)Image: Physical analogue <br< th=""><th>Table 2:</th><th></th><th></th></br<> | Table 2: | | | | | | | | |
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| | Monthly | Health Assessment Questionnaire (HAQ) impact of disease on daily activities including function, mobility and grooming | Fixed point scales (radio button) -plus free text entry box | | | | | | |

Methods

Qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of key stakeholders to explore the study aims: 10 RA practitioners (clinicians, nurses and physiotherapists), 12 RA researchers (with a range of research backgrounds and interests) and 18 patients with RA (3) men, 15 women, ages 32 – 84)

A thematic analysis using a framework structured on the above aims was used to explore the following:

- the range of ePROs identified by participants
- the frequency with which participants felt specified ePROs should be recorded
- the format in which ePROs could be captured Ο
- areas of consensus/divergence with regard to 'what, when and how' ePROs could be Ο recorded

The stages of data analysis are summarised in table 1:

Table 1:

Stages of obtaining consensus regarding the components of the app

| Interviews were conducted with practitioners and researchers regarding their |
|--|
| preferences. |

ePROs identified were tabulated and discussed with the REMORA PPI (patient and public involvement) group, and the table refined. Adjustments included improving the clarity of question wording (e.g. '24 hours' rather than 'day')

Conclusions

Consensus on the key components of the smartphone app was achieved following a process of consultation with patients, practitioners and researchers (table 1).

Key components identified (table 2) have been incorporated into the 'app in readiness for piloting within clinical practice. Exemplars of the formats are displayed below.

| | | • • • | • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • |
|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Considering your arthritis | select '0' if you did not experience any stiffness) | select '0' if you did not experience any stiffness) Have you experienced a flare in the last week? | I feel |
| overall, how would you rate your level of physical well being during the last 24 hrs? | 0 | | because |
| | 1-9 minutes | | 0/150 |
| | 10-19 minutes | | |
| ry good 2 Very had | 20-29 minutes | No No | |
| very bad | 30-59 minutes | Yes | |
| | | | |



Patients were interviewed regarding their preferences and also asked to feedback on tabulated suggestions.

The research team analysed the interviews to identify components which had widespread consensus across the stakeholder groups (such as pain, joint swelling). Suggestions made less commonly (such as diet, exercise) were documented, but not included in the final question sets.

PPI group members reviewed the suitability of the app prior to the commencement of the pilot.



Further information





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