

E&NH0635

Rheumatoid arthritis patients accessing earlier care



Consultant rheumatologist, Dr Bhathiya Wijeyekoon, examines a patient at the Lister hospital

Stevenage, UK – 23 March 2018 – Patients who have their [rheumatoid arthritis](#) diagnosed early and the condition managed actively tend to have better clinical outcomes, improved quality of life and less likelihood of requiring orthopaedic surgery. This is the service that is on offer through the Trust's rheumatology team, which is in line with best practice nationally.

Over recent years, the Trust's consultant rheumatologists have sought to work with their GP colleagues to spot patients with early symptoms so that they are referred in to clinic more quickly. Vetting all referrals also allows patients to access a reconfigured one-stop service – including having all the relevant blood tests undertaken and treatment started as required. At these clinics, further appointments are made to provide education about the patient's condition and treatment. The team reviews symptoms, treatment and blood test results, as well as giving patients access to a dedicated advice line supported by rheumatology nurse specialists.

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Consultant rheumatologist, Dr Bhathiya Wijeyekoon, explains:

“Best practice nationally, which has been informed by research findings, shows that diagnosing rheumatoid arthritis early and treating it aggressively provides patients with better clinical outcomes and, just as importantly, improved quality of life. Our one stop clinic, supported by annual reviews and access to our advice line, means more people can lead their lives in remission from their underlying condition. This in turn reduces the need for them to move on to far more expensive forms of treatment or even requiring orthopaedic surgery.”

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About the Trust's rheumatoid arthritis

[Rheumatoid arthritis](#) is a long-term condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in the joints that is thought to affect approximately 1% of adults in the UK, usually affecting the hands, feet and wrists. It is an autoimmune disease, which means that people's immune systems – which fight infection normally – attack the cells that line joints by mistake, making them swollen, stiff and painful. Over time, the condition can damage the joint itself, cartilage and nearby bone. There may be periods where symptoms become worse – known as flare-ups or flares – that can require people to be admitted to hospital.

The early arthritis clinics form part of a wider service from the Trust's rheumatology team, which also includes annual review and – from January 2018 – flare clinics that result in patients with rheumatoid arthritis having access to one of the best performing services in the country that increasingly is gaining national recognition for the high quality care the team provides.

Further information and advice about rheumatoid arthritis is provided by [Arthritis Research UK](#).

The East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

The Trust provides a wide range of acute and tertiary care services from four hospitals, namely the: Lister in Stevenage; New QEII in Welwyn Garden City; Hertford County in Hertford; and the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre in Northwood, Middlesex

For more information about the Trust, go to the [website](#).

For more information, please call the communications team on: 01438 285362 or 01438 285940; for out-of-hours calls, please page the duty press officer on 07659 103839.

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