



Family Physicians' Responses to New-onset Rheumatoid Arthritis

J. Qian¹, D. Feldman², A. Bissonauth¹, J. Lee¹,
S. Bernatsky¹

¹McGill University Health Centre,
²University of Montreal

1

Background I:

- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can potentially cause severe joint destruction and functional disability.
- Optimal outcome depends on the prompt prescription of disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), which can slow down or even reverse disease progression.

2

Background II:

- Current evidence suggests that an individual with RA should be given DMARDs within 3 months of symptoms onset.
- However, many patients are not seen in such a timely fashion.

3

Objective:

- To study the delay between first primary care assessment and rheumatology referral for individuals with new-onset rheumatoid arthritis.

4

Methods:

- Online surveys were given to family physicians practicing within the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex and the Herzl Family Practice Centre, Montreal, Quebec.
- In attempt to capture their responses to rheumatoid arthritis, physicians (n = 45) were presented to a case scenario of an individual with classical RA symptoms and were asked to describe their clinical suspicion of RA.

5

Results I:

- Roughly one-third (35.6%) of the physicians had high clinical suspicion and one-fifth (20%) of them responded that they could not say it was RA.
- Around 44.4% of them indicated that they would refer this patient to a rheumatologist only when all tests were back and they had reviewed the results.

6

Results II:

- In the event that RA was strongly suspected, only 6.7% of the physicians would start a DMARD and 11.1% would prescribe prednisone.

7

Conclusions:

- These results showed that family physicians were cautious in making a provisional diagnosis of RA, and that they were more likely to rely on test results than RA symptoms.
- This may in part delay rheumatology referrals. DMARD initiation before any consultation with a rheumatologist appears to be rare.
- Overall, these factors might, in part, explain the delay between the first primary care assessment and the prescription of DMARDs.

8

Acknowledgements

- Dr. Bernatsky is a Canadian Arthritis Network Scholar and is supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), CIORA, and the Research Institute and Department of Medicine at the McGill University Health Centre



9