

Rheumatic patients' perspective after the first wave of the COVID19 pandemic and nurses' role in telemedicine follow up

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Background: The ongoing pandemic has caused health problems in people's daily lives and patients affected by Rheumatic Musculoskeletal Diseases (RMDs) have experienced a flare of their condition and psychological problems. Thus, an observational study was designed to investigate how the lockdown and the social quality changes have impacted the life and the health status of these patients, as well as telemedicine's utility and the patients' perception about it.

Results: 40 patients prevalently women (97.5%) were included in the survey and 72% of them reported cancellation or delays in scheduled appointments, and 50% of them did not have alternative contacts (telephone consultations, e-mail prescriptions, telematics training) with the hospital, during the first wave of the pandemic. Also, 40.5% of patients reported difficulty in finding DMARDs and material for the treatment of ulcers, 28.2% reported difficulties in accessing the healthcare facilities with 34.2% of total closure. Patients developed an increased anxiety concerning the management of their disease and an increased stress within the family. In 57% of patients, a worsening of the health status was reported, while in 90% stress and a feeling of abandonment was developed since the beginning of the pandemic. In this context, telemedicine was considered valuable by 97.5% of patients, yet an improvement is still required to integrate it with the regular follow ups.

Conclusions: Patients with RMDs reported that the significant delays or cancellation of the outpatient visits provoked an increase of stress, worry and anxiety for their health status. The worsening of symptoms in more than half of the patients was the most worrisome observation. Almost all patients agreed that nursing follow up through Telemedicine might help the clinical evaluation of their condition, also providing a significant support to their psychological condition because of the direct contact with the caring physician and health professionals.

Biography

Khadija El Aoufy is a junior researcher with an expertise in assessment/evaluation of the quality of life, health and wellbeing of people who struggle with Rheumatic Diseases. At the moment, the main project she is leading, deals with new nursing model to implement in the daily practice. She is member of 2 EULAR task forces (Rheumatoid Arthritis & Systemic Sclerosis), Chair of the session on wound care which will take place in the next EULAR congress (June 2022). Her dedication and passion is dedicated to research questions which are important to patients and patient care – nursing interventions need to be grounded in research evidence to ensure the care we provide is of the highest quality.

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