

Campaign launched in Dudley to help catch rheumatoid arthritis earlier

The people of Dudley are being warned of the early signs of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) to encourage them to seek help sooner in a campaign being launched by specialists at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

The 'EARLY' campaign, developed by the Dudley Rheumatology Service at Russells Hall Hospital, kicks off on 12th October 2012 (World Arthritis Day). It aims to help people spot the signs and symptoms of RA and to understand the importance of early diagnosis and treatment in order to delay or stop the damage caused by this painful inflammatory disease.

"Our own audit data shows that patients have symptoms of RA for an average of 11 months before coming to our clinic for treatment," said Dr Ravinder Sandhu, Consultant Rheumatologist at the Trust.

"There is also evidence to suggest that starting treatment early, and particularly within the first three months of the onset of symptoms, can minimise joint damage and achieve better health outcomes,¹" he continued.

RA is a chronic disease that affects approximately 400,000 people in the UK² and is usually managed by patients at home with support from GPs and hospital-based rheumatologists and specialist nurses.

"RA is a long-term condition in which our immune system begins to attack healthy joints. It can progress quickly, and cause irreversible damage to joints if left untreated," adds Dr Sandhu, who runs the Early RA clinic at Russells Hall Hospital.

Rheumatoid arthritis can also be painful and in severe cases people can lose function in the affected joint. It also causes fatigue, disability and depression, which can adversely affect people's quality of life. If RA is diagnosed and treated early, the long-term effects of this disease can be reduced significantly.³

The symptoms of RA are:

- Early morning joint stiffness
- Aching and throbbing joint pains
- Redness or warm swollen joints
- Lasting symptoms beyond six weeks
- Your small joints of hands or feet affected

*** ENDS ***

NOTES FOR EDITORS

About Dudley Early RA Clinic

The Early RA Clinic, part of the Rheumatology Unit at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust which saw nearly 11,000 patients in 2011,⁴ was set up in 2009 in response to NICE clinical guidelines to improve the management of adults with RA (CG79). It takes referrals from GPs and other health professionals throughout the local area for people with suspected RA.

For further information, please contact:

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References

- 1 Bosello S, Fedele AL, Peluso G, et al. Very early rheumatoid arthritis is the major predictor of major outcomes: clinical ACR remission and radiographic non-progression. *Ann Rheum Dis*. 2011;70:1292-5.
- 2 NICE clinical guidelines for Rheumatoid arthritis, The Management of Rheumatoid Arthritis in Adults. Issued February 2009. Available at: <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12131/43327/43327.pdf> (Accessed 30 August 2012).
- 3 Dudley Early Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) Clinic Patient Information Leaflet. Published September 2010.
- 4 HES Online, Hospital Episode Statistics, Outpatients - Provider level analysis 2010-2011. Table 8: Hospital provider attendances broken down by main specialty