Updating the Patient Partners Educational Program for Rheumatoid Arthritis in Belgium: a systematic, scientific-based approach led by patient experts

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Patient Partner Program: 

*The concept*

- **What?**
  Patient Partners (PP) are expert patients who train medical students, general practitioners and other healthcare providers about the clinical presentation of rheumatoid arthritis (RA)

- **Aim?**
  Fast diagnosis and early treatment initiation by improving musculoskeletal examination skills, creating awareness and facilitating appropriate referrals
Patient Partner Program: *Need for an update: why?*

(1) New scientific insights in early RA
   - early intensive treatment strategies
   - patient beliefs and preferences
   - the hurdles to implement optimal care strategies

(2) Better control of disease → less classical joint deformities and reduced symptoms

**Objective:** to critically review and update the PP Program for RA in Flanders
Updating the Patient Partner Program:

*Methods*

- **How?**
  - a systematic, scientific-based approach
  - led by patient experts

- **Who?**
  - 7 patient partners
  - 1 rheumatologist
  - 1 nurse specialist
  - 2 doctoral researchers
  - 1 medical student
  - 1 general practitioner
Brainstorm session

Identification of content needs

Identification of latest scientific evidence

Agreement on methodology

Credibility check

Pilot testing in group of patient partners

Try-out of the updated content

Development of 4 content modules by patient experts

Home study (all patient partners)

2 day-training meeting (all patient partners)

Updated PP program

Updating the Patient Partner Program:

**Approach**

1. Treatment delay
2. Treatment strategies and perception about medication
3. Patient & the environment
4. Active participation
Module 1: Avoiding treatment delay

- **Principle:** diagnosing within 12 weeks
  - clinical evaluation and medical history ↔ RX and laboratory
  - complete musculoskeletal examination

- **Appropriate referral**
  - glucocorticoids can hide the clinical presentation
  - response on NSAIDs is reason to refer
Updating the Patient Partner Program

Result: **4 content modules**

**Module 2: Treatment strategies and perception about medication**

- Need for early and intensive treatment
- 1\textsuperscript{st} step: MTX and bridging glucocorticoids
- Contextual information taking into account patients’ views
- Information about potential future therapeutic options

Updating the Patient Partner Program: Result: 4 content modules

Module 3:

• Creating awareness about factors patients are confronted with in their environment
  – physical
  – psycho-emotional
  – relational
  – social

• Inviting for active coping with disease and an open discussion
Updating the Patient Partner Program: 
Result: 4 content modules

Module 3:

- Creating awareness about factors patients are confronted with in their environment – physical – psycho- emotional – relational – social
- Inviting for active coping with disease and an open discussion
Updating the Patient Partner Program: Result: 4 content modules

Module 4: Active participation

- Shared decision making
- Adherence
- Organizing life
- Highlighting the importance of physical activity (does not increase inflammation)
- Answering patients’ questions about nutrition

Updating the Patient Partner Program: 

*Take home messages* Thank you for your attention!

- The clinical joint evaluation stays in the center
- Refining classical history taking
- Less focus on classical joint deformities
- Highlighting:
  1) Factors that lead to reduced treatment delay
  2) Correct treatment strategies and perception about medication to improve adherence
  3) Factors important to patients & their environment: relational and psycho-emotional, organized life
  4) Active participation: shared decision making, physical activity
- Initiated and developed by patients based on science. Ready to implement and to be evaluated.