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IMPROVING AWARENESS AND ACCESS TO WORK RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH RHEUMATIC AND MUSCULOSKELETAL CONDITIONS

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Background:

Supporting people with health conditions to remain in work is a UK government priority. Rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) greatly impact people's working lives [1], yet support to work often remains an unmet need.

Aims:

We aimed to explore awareness and use of work-related support services amongst people with RMDs, work resources provided by UK RMD charities, and identify areas for improvement.

Method:

A UK cross-sectional web-based survey of people reporting a RMD diagnosis contained questions on awareness and use of work-related support services. Co-designed with patient partners, the survey was disseminated to charities and social media channels between 30/8/21-26/11/21. RMD charity websites were searched for information on work, including breadth and frequency of topics covered. Ten patient contributors assessed the usefulness of topics covered and any gaps.

Results:

859 people completed the survey. Work support was identified as a priority. Of the 36% participants currently employed, most were not aware of work-related support services such as 'Access to Work' (56.7%), or availability of support from a disability employment advisor/Job Centre (73.1%). Few had received work advice/rehabilitation from an NHS therapist (7.3%) or occupational health practitioner (12.7%) and over 70% were not aware that such support was available. 18 UK RMD charities were identified. There was significant variation in the work information provided, with limited internal signposting between charities to those with more comprehensive resources. Employer information was limited.

Conclusion:

This study provides important guidance to improve awareness and development of resources to support people with RMDs to work.

References:

1. Versus Arthritis. The State of Musculoskeletal Health 2021 (2021), <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/the-state-of-musculoskeletal-health/> [last accessed: 25/02/2023]
2. The Council for Work and Health. Talking work: a guide for doctors discussing work and work modifications with patients. Available: <https://www.councilforworkandhealth.org.uk/work-modifications/> [last accessed: 25/02/2023]