

# Compliance with Immunosuppression for Rheumatic Disease During COVID-19

O'Leary A., Urbaniak A., Phelan M., Harty L.

Department of Rheumatology, South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital

## Background

Reassuring data has been published regarding the safety of continued use of immunosuppressant drugs for rheumatic disease during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, patients on immunosuppressant medication and their doctors have been concerned about increased risk during the COVID-19 crisis. Our rheumatology department wished to establish the confidence of our patients in continuing their immunosuppression during the pandemic.

## Conclusions

Very few of our patients reported a reduction in compliance with immunosuppression during the pandemic. It is encouraging that the majority of our outpatients continued to be compliant with treatment for rheumatic disease in accordance with current guidelines. We infer that our patients are largely very confident in taking their immunosuppressant therapy. We are not aware of any of our patients having contracted COVID-19 to date.

## Methods

We performed a survey of our outpatient population to analyse compliance with antirheumatic treatment during the pandemic. We sent a questionnaire by post to 643 patients with rheumatic disease in July 2020. The survey requested participants to indicate the immunosuppressant medications they were currently prescribed, and whether or not they had remained compliant throughout the pandemic thus far.

## Results

We received 398 completed surveys after a two-week period, a response rate of 62%. Of these, 6% of patients reported stopping one or more medications during the pandemic (n=23), whereas 94% continued taking all of their anti-rheumatic medication as prescribed.

Patients taking at least one DMARD made up 75% of the cohort (n=299), the majority of whom were taking methotrexate (n=271).

Of this group, 287 out of 299 patients continued to take at least one DMARD (96%). Seven patients were taking 2 DMARDs, and two of these patients stopped taking one DMARD.

There were 195 patients taking biologic therapy (59%). Nine people reported stopping a biologic during the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas 95% of patients continued to take their biologic as prescribed.

There were 37 patients who were prescribed a steroid medication – the dose was not specified. Two of these patients reported stopping their steroid during the pandemic (5%).

## Overall Compliance

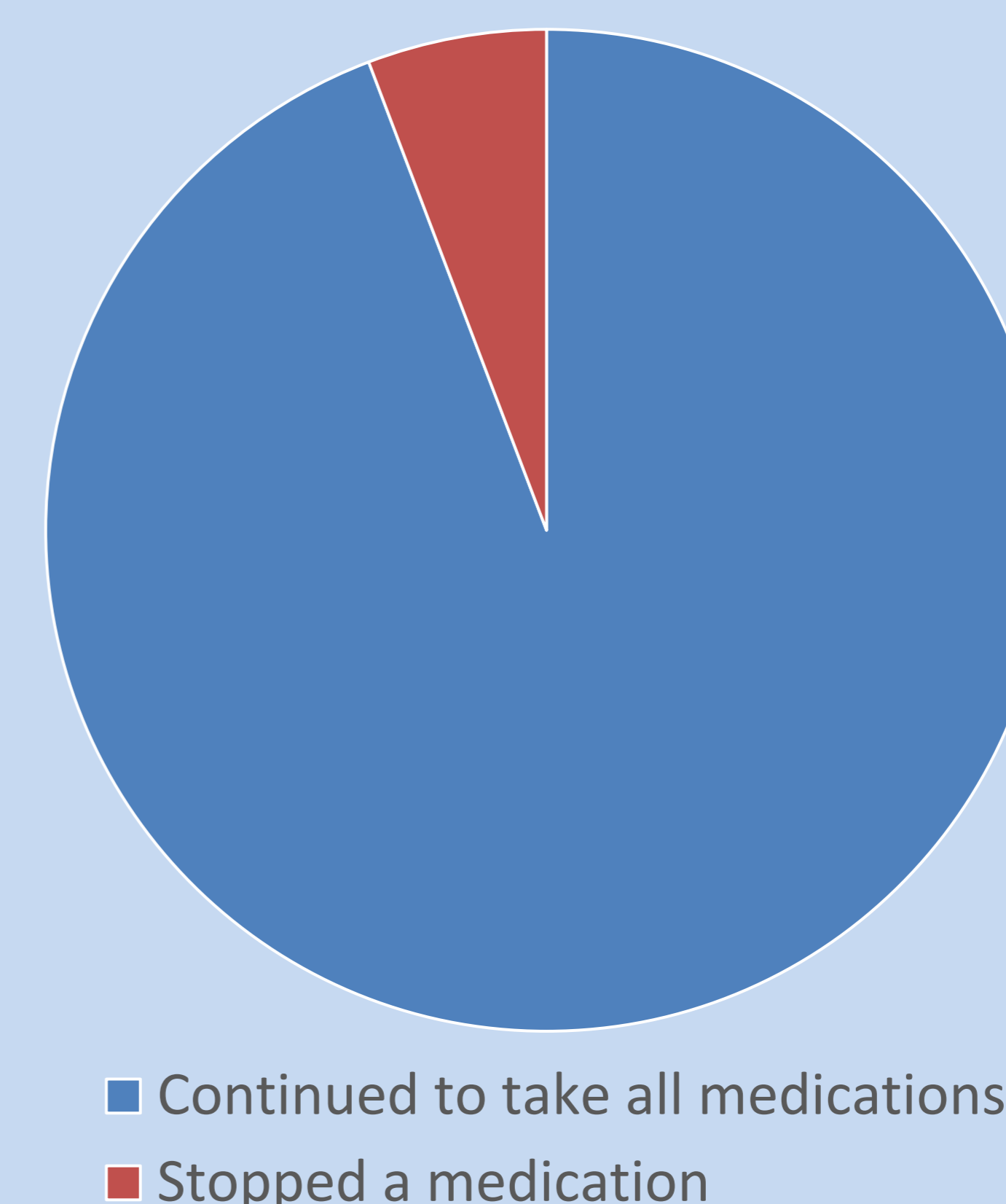


Figure 1. Representation of overall compliance with antirheumatic therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drug	Stopped	Continued
DMARD (n=299)	12	287
Biologic (n=195)	9	186
Steroid (n=37)	2	35

Table 1. Number of patients who stopped taking each medication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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