

Audit of referrals to Rheumatology rapid access clinic at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

- Rapid access clinic (RAC) is a service provided by the Rheumatology department in the Belfast Trust for the early assessment of patients with an acute rheumatology issue.
- This service was initially delivered on a weekly basis and was increased to daily at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure urgent face to face clinical assessment could continue.

Aim

- To evaluate the common presentations, patient demographics and referral sources to the Rheumatology RAC service to determine how this new service is being utilised.

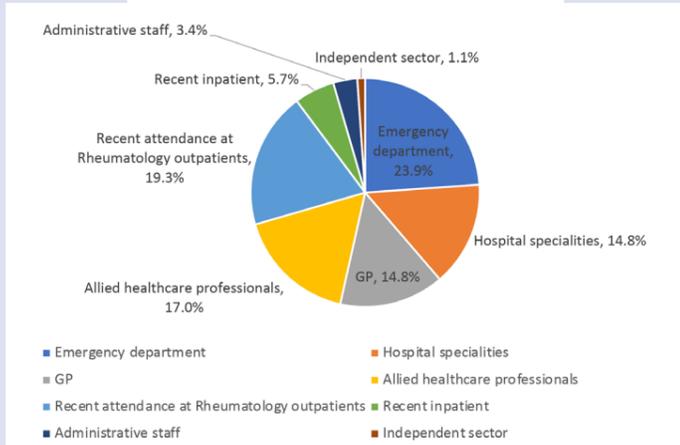
Method

- Referrals to RAC were audited over a 5-week period.
- Patient demographics, diagnosis and interventions were recorded.

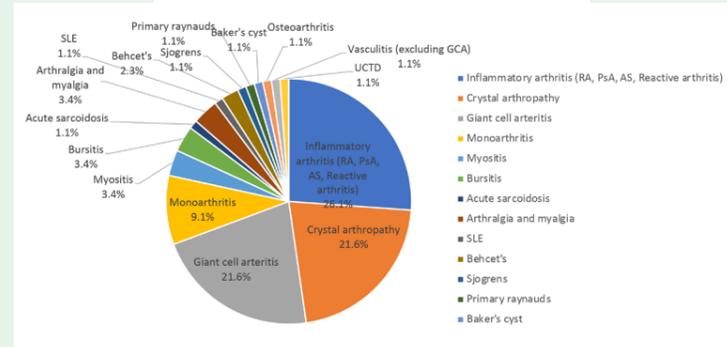
Results

- 92 patients referred, with 88 patients attended and assessed at RAC over a 5-week period.
- 37 patients were male (42%) and 51 patients were female (58%).
- Average age was 58; youngest patient aged 24 and oldest aged 94.
- 4.6 out of 5 daily RAC slots were filled; fill rate was 92% in the 5-week period.
- Average waiting time to be seen at RAC was 8.35 days.
- 52.3% of patients were known to Rheumatology services and 47.7% were new referrals

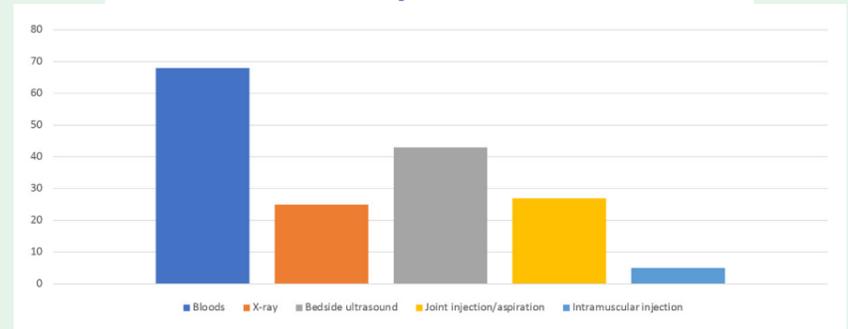
Source of Referrals



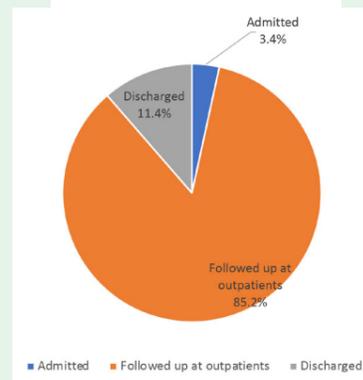
Conditions seen at RAC



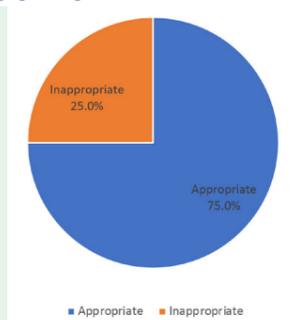
Interventions performed at RAC



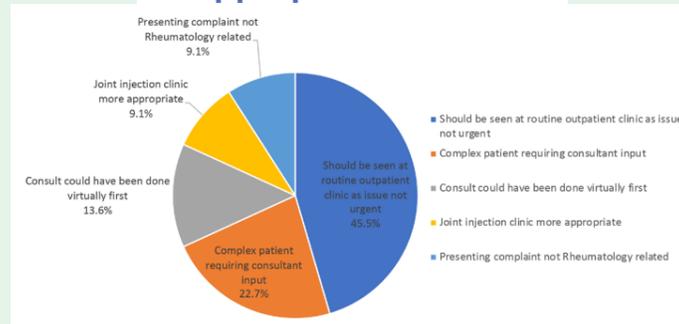
Outcomes



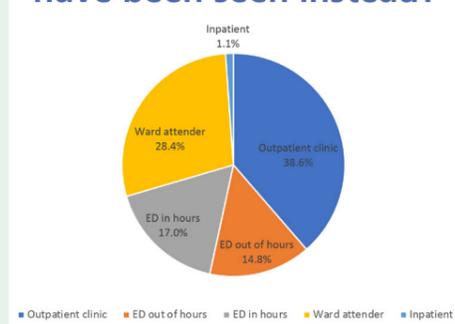
Was the referral appropriate for RAC?



Why was the referral inappropriate for RAC?



If RAC did not exist, where would the patients have been seen instead?



Conclusion

- RAC is an invaluable service that allows us to provide prompt assessment of patients with urgent presentations.
- Most referrals were for inflammatory arthritis, crystal arthropathy and giant cell arteritis.
- Without RAC, these patients would have waited significantly longer for specialist rheumatology assessment, as a result of marked reduction in outpatient face-to-face clinics since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Increased waiting times may in turn lead to permanent joint or organ damage.
- Further work is needed in evaluating appropriateness of RAC referrals in order to improve waiting time.