Aspiring to Excellence: Quality Improvement in Axial Spondyloarthritis at University Hospital Southampton

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BACKGROUND

Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) can be associated with a delay to diagnosis. Anecdotal evidence at UHS suggested that patients were referred via different pathways and that some were not having the correct MRI protocol for diagnosis.

OBJECTIVES

Aim 1: Reduce time from presentation of AS in primary care to rheumatology referral

Aim 2: Reduce variation in use of imaging to diagnose axSpA

METHODS

Aim 1

- Map referral pathways
- Audit referral time
- Survey GPs
- Explore patient perspectives:

"Felt embarrassed explaining why I thought I might have AS" "No-one ever believed me" "You don't look like someone who has AS" "I'm young, I'll get over it" "...because I was young and a woman"

ACTIONS

 New e-referral service developed, linked to axSpA clinic. Includes GP educational materials: live May 2021

Aim 2

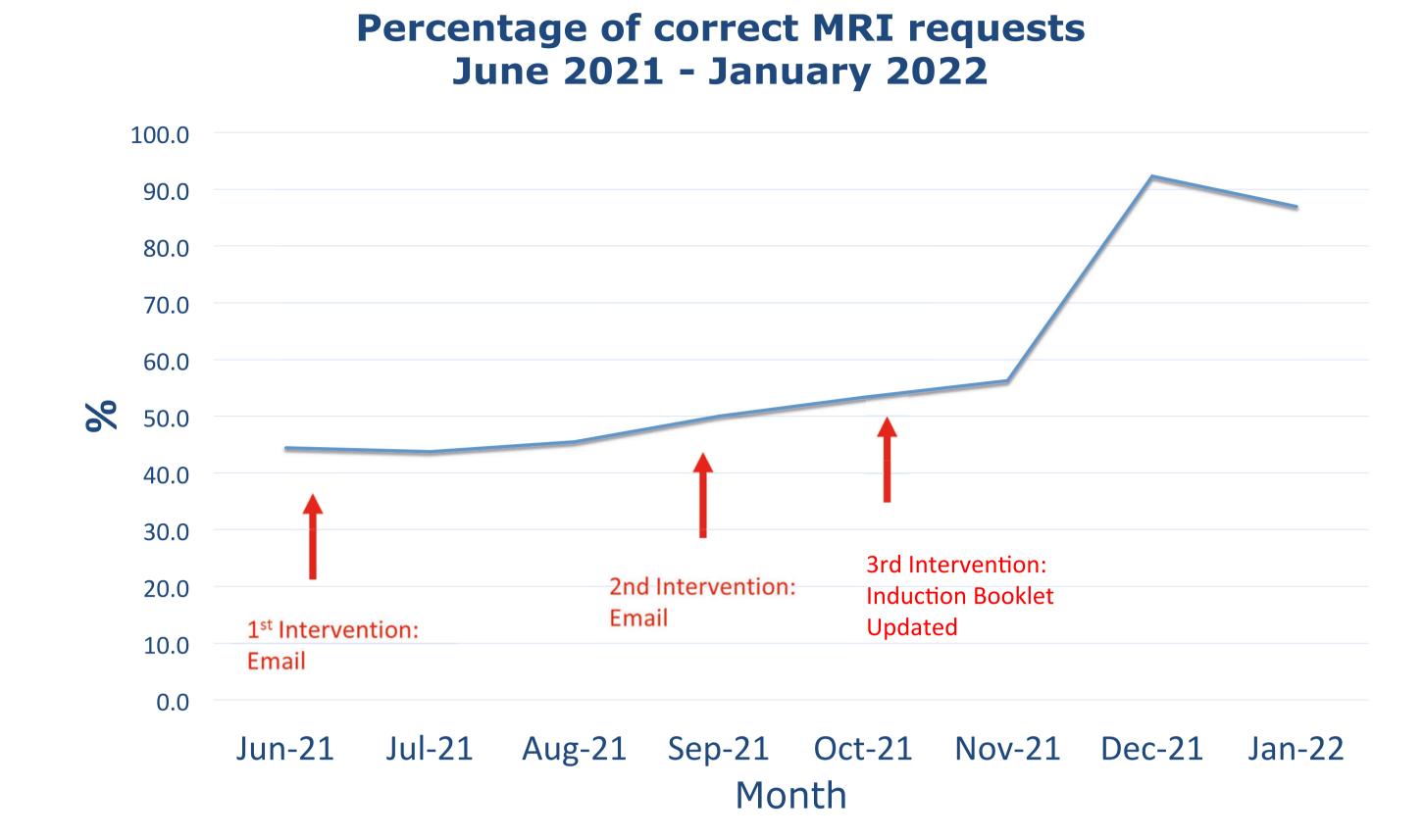
Identify how patients are currently imaged

ACTIONS

- Introduced new MRI protocol: live June 2021
- Education provided re new protocol
- Ongoing monthly audit with feedback to requestors
- Amended junior doctor induction document

RESULTS

- Baseline audit: median referral time 1-2y; range 0-14y
- From Jun to Dec 2021, 13 patients were referred via the new axSpA service
- 12/13 referrals were for suspected axSpA
- Of these, 7/13 were new referrals; 6/13 were known to have AS requiring a new appointment at UHS
- 6/7 new patients had CRP and 3/7 had pelvis x-ray in primary care





DRIVER DIAGRAM

Which requires: To achieve We need to ensure: **Interventions to ensure this happens:** this aim: Link new inflammatory back pain referrals to Specialised axSpA clinic at UHS axSpA consultant clinic Patient pathway from Liaise with e-referral team to create new An e-referral system specific for inflammatory back pain primary care into axSpA clinic is well-organised service GP educational material within referral High level of GP knowledge proforma Primary care clinicians are Recommended investigations listed in able to recognise axSpA Reduce time Patients have the right investigations in primary care referral proforma from presentation of AS in Work with radiology colleagues to implement New MRI protocol to be set up primary care protocol to diagnosis Correct MRI protocol is Education of rheumatology and other clinicians about Audit, educational meetings, direct feedback used in secondary care new protocol by email to requestors

CONCLUSION

- New e-referral system is being used successfully with patients now booked to specialist clinic
- New MRI protocol has reduced resource use in radiology with a high proportion of patients now having correct scan
- Further investigation is required (1) to find out if delay to diagnosis is improving (2) to obtain qualitative feedback from GPs about referral system and GP educational needs













