

A physiotherapist led axSpA clinic– Inverclyde Royal Hospital



Axial SpA works silently. We don't.

BACKGROUND

Inverclyde Royal Hospital (IRH) provides an axial Spondyloarthritis (axSpA) service to people in the Inverclyde region of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Servicing a population of 125,000, which includes some of the most deprived areas in Scotland, IRH axSpA clinic runs once per month with 100 new and return patients attending annually. The clinic is consultant led with specialist physiotherapist input for metrology, advice and education. Onward referral is made for further physiotherapy interventions including virtual exercise and hydrotherapy.

We started by considering where undiagnosed patients might be attending the health service. In the Inverclyde region our GP physiotherapists are able to refer directly to rheumatology for suspected axSpA. Conversely MSK physiotherapists providing rehabilitation in physiotherapy departments are unable to refer to rheumatology. In addition, >40% of patients attending MSK physiotherapy self refer without having seen a health professional for their symptoms.

We were aware that with the population of the area our clinic serves and an estimated 1 in 220 people suffering axSpA we would expect to have closer to 625 patients attending annually.

OBJECTIVES

Aim: Ensure all patients with suspected axSpA in Inverclyde MSK physiotherapy service are seen and diagnosed within a timely manner (Figure 1).

In doing so we aim to reduce the delay to diagnosis to < 1 year and improve quality of care.

As a small unit we have struggled to collect sufficient data to measure any meaningful change in delay to diagnosis, but we now have the right steps in place to deliver this in the future with ongoing support. We have a diverse project team including an occupational therapist and a pharmacist. Each team member has brought a unique perspective. We appreciate that team members will contribute in different ways as the project evolves.



METHOD

- Built guiding coalition through meeting with local managers and clinicians.
- Delivered recognising axSpA education to MSK physiotherapists.
- Established streamlined referral pathway from MSK physiotherapy directly to IRH axSpA clinic.
- Built additional capacity in the clinic with Advanced Practice Physiotherapist seeing new patients at first contact.
- Collection of impact data and measures including delay to diagnosis survey and patient experience.

RESULTS

We have an additional 3 appointments / month in IRH axSpA clinic for new patients referred from MSK physiotherapy with suspected axSpA.

We have ran 2 clinics and diagnosed 1 patient with axSpA with a further 3 awaiting investigation results. Patients were seen within < 4 weeks of referral.

Feedback was collected by our occupational therapist from patients attending the physiotherapist at first contact and has been extremely positive (Figure 2).

CONCLUSION

We are a monthly clinic in one hospital within the largest health board in Scotland. Creating conditions for and implementing change within the NHS can take time and poses challenges. We have a strong rheumatology team and project team with a can do attitude. Where we have faced problems we have managed to overcome them. Most of the challenges have been practical in relation to securing space for the physiotherapist in clinic, administrative staff to manage appointments and securing funding for training and authorisation of imaging rights to allow the physiotherapist to work autonomously.

We now have administrative support to assist with collection of outcome measures and impact data including the delay to diagnosis survey. This will allow us to accurately calculate our local delay to diagnosis, measure improvement and make further improvements to achieve our project aim.

Figure 1. Project Driver Diagram

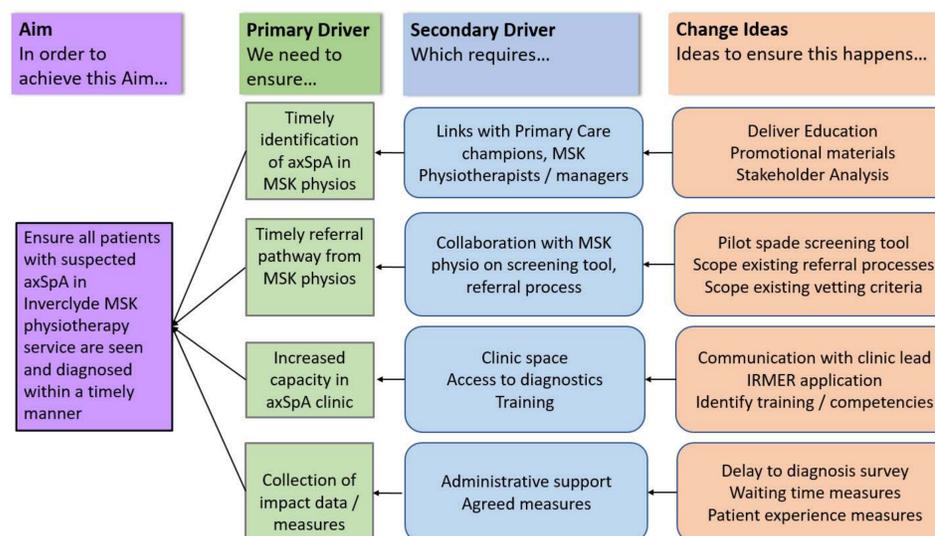


Figure 2. Qualitative feedback on patient experience

The physiotherapist in clinic was excellent. He had a really good understanding of my issues.

I was very impressed how quick the service was from seeing MSK physio to getting an appointment at rheumatology then an appointment for a scan.

No one has ever explained my condition to me like this. Now that I understand I can plan how to manage it.

Very happy with the service and everything was carried out that I expected.

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