

THE BSR BIOLOGICS REGISTER

Improving treatment for rheumatoid arthritis

Dr Kimme Hyrich, The University of Manchester
Dr Chris Deighton, British Society for Rheumatology

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) affects 1 in every 100 adults in the UK and causes chronic pain, disability, employment loss and early mortality.

Standard treatments (such as methotrexate) are not effective in all patients with RA and have a range of undesirable side-effects. In 2002, a new class of medication known as 'biologics' was approved. Although proven safe in clinical trials, the 'real-world' effects were unproven.

In 2001, the University of Manchester and the British Society for Rheumatology launched a national patient register to monitor the long-term effects of these therapies. Over 22,000 patients are now being followed across the NHS

Influencing prescribing guidelines

Our study found a clear benefit when patients continued methotrexate alongside their biologic drug. This information was incorporated into NICE guidance and increasingly, physicians prescribe both drugs together and more patients are now in remission.

Keeping patients informed

Researchers also identified a previously unknown increased risk of salmonella and listeria infections; rates of these infections dropped dramatically following an update to drug information leaflets advising patients to avoid high risk foods.

Millions of patients worldwide have now received biologics and the systematic capture of data on treatment and outcomes among NHS patients has led directly to improved outcomes for all patients with this chronic disabling condition.

The BSR Biologics Register is a collaborative project between medical charities, academia, the NHS and 6 industry partners. For more information please visit www.rheumatology.org.uk/bsrbr

