Optimal primary care management of clinical osteoarthritis and joint pain in older people: a mixed-methods programme of systematic reviews, observational and qualitative studies, and randomised controlled trials

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a common painful condition in mid to later life that affects daily activities such as walking and climbing stairs. Research shows that simple things such as providing information about OA and exercise can reduce the symptoms, but many sufferers do not receive this information or get advice and encouragement to put it into practice.

Our programme addressed how to make OA interventions more available and more effective by conducting four large research studies:

1. We developed ways to use existing data sets to investigate how to offer the best possible treatments for OA in ways that are effective for patients as well as being affordable for the NHS.
2. In a large trial, we tested how the best care for OA can be delivered in general practitioner (GP) practices with an OA guidebook and structured support by the GP and practice nurse. We showed that it is possible to improve the quality of OA care and we are now using this information to implement best-quality OA care more widely in primary care in the NHS.
3. We conducted a trial comparing different ways to help people to find the right exercise routine and maintain it over time. We found that more intense exercise programmes did not improve symptoms more than exercise already offered by NHS physiotherapists to people with OA.
4. We investigated detecting and managing concurrent depression and anxiety in people with OA. This did not improve OA symptoms more than usual care in general practice.

Overall, this programme has added valuable information about which primary care treatments are effective and which are not effective for people with OA. It has also provided evidence to guide the direction of future research into improving care for people with OA.
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