

Intensive therapy for moderate established rheumatoid arthritis: the TITRATE research programme

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Plain English summary

The TITRATE research programme

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Plain English summary

Inflamed joints in rheumatoid arthritis are unpleasant and reduce quality of life. Many drugs reduce this inflammation. The ideal treatment goal is remission. When patients with active rheumatoid arthritis are treated intensively using gradually increasing doses of combinations of drugs they achieve more remissions. But many patients live with moderately active disease. There is uncertainty as to whether or not these patients benefit from intensive management. Our research focused on this problem.

Part of the research involved working with patients to identify how best to give intensive management. Monthly sessions with nurses in rheumatology clinics providing supportive care together with a handbook for patients were positively received by patients.

The central part of the research was a trial to investigate whether or not intensive management helped patients with moderately active rheumatoid arthritis. The trial compared intensive management using drug therapy and supportive non-drug approaches given by specialist nurses with standard care. Intensive management increased the number of patients in remission after 1 year. With intensive management, approximately one-third of patients were in remission, compared with about one-sixth of patients receiving standard care. Intensive management also reduced patients' fatigue levels. In the trial, intensive management did not increase harms.

The benefits of intensive management need to be set against its additional costs. These were relatively high. In addition, not all patients benefited. Patients who had high pretreatment physical disability or who were substantially overweight usually did not achieve remission.

The final part of the research considered broader perspectives of intensive management. Studying all trials of this approach showed that many types of intensive management increase remissions. Reviews of routine care over the last two decades showed that treatment intensities have gradually increased and more patients now achieve remissions.

Overall, our research shows that intensive management benefits patients with moderately active rheumatoid arthritis; however, not all patients benefited and the treatment was relatively expensive.

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This report

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