**Intensive treatment strategies for early rheumatoid arthritis**: A qualitative study exploring experiences and views of rheumatologists and nurses

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**BACKGROUND**

Theoretical acceptance: To treat early RA, the focus is set to achieve clinical remission as soon as possible with an early and intensive treatment.

Practical implementation:
- Early treatment: 21% of patients (Belgium, 2012)
- Intensive treatment: 18% of patients (Belgium, 2006)

- Which factors determine the rheumatologists’ decision (not) to prescribe intensive combination treatment strategies (ICTS)?
- What are the barriers and facilitators encountered by rheumatologists and nurses during the implementation process?

**METHODS**

- Exploratory, descriptive, qualitative research design

**RESULTS**

The model represents the factors within four major themes that influenced the decision-making and prescription process of ICTS.

Two pair of examples of quotes illustrate that each factor could either facilitate or impede the prescription of ICTS.

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**DISCUSSION**

**Treatment.**
- Beside resistance to or preference for individual compounds, some rheumatologists expressed their concern about potential difficulties to evaluate the effect of a combination therapy.
- The initiation is experienced as time consuming due to education, but could facilitate the follow-up.

**Healthcare professional.**
- Healthcare professionals more often rely on personal beliefs and experiences rather than on scientific evidence.
- Healthcare professionals are often satisfied with their current practices.

**Patient.**
- The healthcare professionals feared patient non-compliance with the treatment.
- The healthcare professionals could make inaccurate assumptions about the patients’ beliefs and preferences.

**Environment.**
- Guidelines, recommendations and reimbursement rules facilitate sound clinical decision-making.
- The difference in organizational support between rheumatologic units demonstrates the complexity of implementation in daily clinical practice.

The heterogeneous set of factors influencing the decision-making and prescription process of ICTS demonstrates the complexity of implementation in daily clinical practice.

The development of implementation strategies requires further exploration:

- Patients’ views and experiences regarding ICTS
- Quantifying relative impact of the factors

**REFERENCES**


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