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## Media Release

### RUH & RNHRD team launches new virtual rehab programme

Rheumatology outpatients at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust are benefitting from a new virtual rehabilitation programme – one of the first of its kind in the country.

The Axial Spondyloarthritis (AxSpA) Programme is usually carried out in person but in response to the challenges of COVID-19, outpatients can now access the programme online, with physiotherapists on hand to take them through a range of exercises and answer any questions they may have.

Physiotherapist Vicky Lewis-Baldy said: “Our AxSpA team have been hard at work over the last few months developing the rehabilitation programme so that it can be launched virtually.

“We would normally deliver this residential programme over two weeks, face to face, but by running the course virtually we can save our patients a trip to the hospital and they can follow the course from home, using a laptop, tablet or mobile phone.

“We believe we are one of the first places in the country to deliver this rehabilitation programme online and the feedback we have had from patients on the pilot course has been fantastic – they are reaping the rewards.

“We will continue to develop the programme and involve patients in shaping the content, to make sure they can make their rehabilitation journey a successful one.”

The aim of the course is to provide patients with education and self-management strategies to empower them to feel in control of their condition.

The pilot course, developed by Physiotherapists Georgia Smyth, Emily Graham, Polly Chalk, Mike Wong and Vicky Lewis-Baldy and research fellow Dr Elizabeth Reilly, has proved a great success, with really positive feedback from patients, who are benefitting from a successful rehabilitation programme in the comfort of their own home.

Each day has a varied mix of sessions, including live educational talks, exercise and stretching sessions. There is input from physiotherapists, occupational therapists, specialist nurses, a podiatrist and a psychologist.

The course also includes two sessions with the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) where patients can discuss their medical management with lead consultant Dr Raj Sengupta and the team.

Dr Raj Sengupta, Lead Consultant, said: "The COVID pandemic has challenged us with providing face to face healthcare in virtual formats. Our physiotherapists have risen to the challenge and in the space of a few months, transformed our nationally renowned AxSpA rehabilitation course into a virtual format.

"I had the pleasure of doing my first virtual MDT ward round with the course patients last week and it was a really fantastic experience.

"I am looking forward to the virtual course reaching AxSpA patients all over the country and giving them an opportunity to learn more about their condition and how to manage it."

Georgia Smyth, the new team leader for AxSpA, said: "Coming into the AxSpA programme as the new team lead I can see the amount of time and attention to detail behind the development of the virtual course. The delivery of our pilot course ran so smoothly which just shows the care and dedication the team have to their patients.

"I'd like to thank the team at Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases (BIRD) for facilitating our patient focus group that has helped to shape our virtual course. We're also very grateful to Dyson for the donation of a number of iPads to the Forever Friends Appeal - we are making good use of one for our exercise sessions."

Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) is a painful and progressive form of inflammatory arthritis, affecting about one in 200 people in the UK. It mostly commonly affects the spine but can affect other joints, tendons and organs.

You can watch Georgia talking about the new course [here](#)

## Ends

### Notes to Editor:

The World Health Organization has designated 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale. Our nurses and midwives are a big part of the RUH family and throughout the year we are celebrating the work they do, going above and beyond every day to give our patients compassionate care.

The Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust provides acute treatment and care for a catchment population of around 500,000 people in Bath, and the surrounding towns and villages in North East Somerset and Western Wiltshire. The hospital provides healthcare to the population served by four Clinical Commissioning Groups: Bath & North East Somerset CCG, Wiltshire CCG, Somerset CCG and South Gloucestershire CCG.

The Trust provides 759 beds and a comprehensive range of acute services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

In 2015 The Royal United Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust acquired the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (RNHRD) NHS Foundation Trust. The RNHRD treats patients from across the country offering services in rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME, cancer related fatigue and fatigue linked to other long term conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

The RUH is changing - we have an exciting programme of redevelopment underway transforming our site and further improving the services we provide. The Trust has opened the purpose-built RNHRD and Brownsword Therapies Centre and is now working towards the new Dyson Cancer Centre. For more details visit: [www.ruh.nhs.uk/about/fit\\_for\\_the\\_future](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/about/fit_for_the_future)

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

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