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Media Release

Patients praise virtual rehabilitation programme

Rheumatology outpatients at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust have praised a ground breaking virtual rehabilitation programme as 'excellent' and thanked the 'dedicated staff'.

The Axial Spondyloarthritis (AxSpA) Programme is usually carried out in person but in response to the challenges of COVID-19, outpatients can now access a virtual rehabilitation programme – one of the first of its kind in the country.

The positive feedback comes ahead of World Axial Spondyloarthritis day on Saturday 8 May, which aims to raise awareness of the condition, a painful and progressive form of inflammatory arthritis, most commonly affecting the spine but which can also affect other joints, tendons and organs.

Patients at the RUH have been full of praise for the online course, which has physiotherapists on hand to take them through a range of exercises and answer any questions they may have.

One patient said: "The course was extremely informative. I have learned a lot and it has changed my outlook. All the staff were brilliant, friendly, welcoming and knowledgeable."

Another said: "I thought the course was excellent and the staff are clearly dedicated."

A third said: "I didn't start the course in a good place and my expectations were low. I was proved completely wrong – I'm now in a much better place and feel more positive and energised. I would definitely recommend it."

Georgia Smyth, Team Leader for AxSpA, said: "The feedback we've had from patients about the virtual course has been overwhelmingly positive.

"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.

“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.

“This has been a real team effort and we’re delighted that the course has been so well received by patients and is having such a positive impact on their condition.”

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been more focus on the importance of remote management and self-monitoring.

The RUH has been working with the Department for Health and Department of Computer Science at The University of Bath on Project Nightingale, a study which uses a smartphone app to allow people with AxSpA to track their daily symptoms and behaviour. ...

This has allowed people with AxSpA to gain a better understanding of their condition, while also providing key data for research, providing a unique, new understanding of AxSpA and patients’ daily experiences.

Rosie Barnett, PhD Student and Researcher working on Project Nightingale, said: “Project Nightingale is allowing us to capture subtle changes in disease experience, not currently considered in clinical practice. We hope that in future, this research will help optimise and personalise treatment for AxSpA, to improve quality of life for patients.

“Some of our participants have said that the app has helped them better understand their condition and encouraged them to implement lifestyle changes to improve their symptoms. We are excited about the future of this work and the impact it may have on the AxSpA community.”

You can find out more on the Project Nightingale blog - www.projectnightingale.org ...

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Notes to Editor:

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

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk

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