Author's response to reviews

Title: Understanding the information needs of women with rheumatoid arthritis concerning pregnancy, post-natal care and early parenting: A mixed-methods study

Authors:

Ilana N Ackerman (i.ackerman@unimelb.edu.au)
Joanne E Jordan (healthsense_aust@bigpond.com)
Sharon Van Doornum (svd@unimelb.edu.au)
Margaret Ricardo (margaret.ricardo@arthritisvic.org.au)
Andrew M Briggs (andrew briggs@arthritisvic.org.au)

Version: 2
Date: 23 February 2015

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Madam / Sir,

RE Understanding the information needs of women with rheumatoid arthritis concerning pregnancy, post-natal care and early parenting: A mixed-methods study.

Thank you for considering our transferred manuscript for publication in BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders.

Women with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) face a number of challenges in negotiating the journey to parenthood, mainly due to symptoms and functional limitations associated with the condition and the potential side-effects of RA medications. While previous studies have identified substantial information needs among people with RA, no studies have explored the specific information needs of women with RA during their childbearing years, leaving an important gap in the literature. Our study aimed to determine the information needs of women with RA concerning pregnancy, post-natal care and early parenting.

Using an innovative mixed-methods approach (comprising interviews, focus groups and validated instruments), this research identified several key knowledge and service gaps. The results demonstrate a pressing need to develop accessible, consumer-focused information and support services for women with RA, and highlight the importance of upskilling health professionals who commonly encounter women with RA during this important life stage. Our findings have several implications for practice and policy; based on these, we have developed a detailed set of recommendations to assist health professionals and arthritis organisations to improve the provision of information to this patient group.

Although no specific revisions were requested by Arthritis Research and Therapy, we wish to respond to the comment received from the Editorial Board. Our study provides new and specific data about the type of information that is important to women with RA, in relation to pregnancy, breastfeeding and early parenting. As these life stages relate specifically to women of childbearing years (and the issues raised are unique to women with inflammatory arthritis), it will not be meaningful to situate the research findings within the context of the educational needs of other patient groups (for example, males and females with RA or people undergoing joint replacement surgery, as suggested) and we do not feel that this approach would add value to the manuscript.

On behalf of the authors, thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ilana Ackerman
Senior Research Fellow
Melbourne EpiCentre, Department of Medicine (Royal Melbourne Hospital)
The University of Melbourne, Australia
Email: i.ackerman@unimelb.edu.au