Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 29 June 2015

Reviewer: Monika Ostensen

Reviewer’s report:

The authors assessed the need for (and preferred mode/s of delivery of) information regarding pregnancy, post-natal care and early parenting among women with RA. This timely study is well designed and well performed and provides important aspects of patients’ needs.

1. The results of the individual telephone interviews and the focus groups are not unexpected considering previous work in this area (Østensen M, Rugelsjøen A. Problem areas of the rheumatic mother. Am J Repr Immunol 1992; 28: 254-5.). However, the study reveals a large gap in the knowledge on reproduction issues in the region of patient recruitment. The knowledge available on the internet and in publications is obviously not disseminated sufficiently to health professionals, so patients are left with a huge number of unanswered questions.

2. Several countries have taken care of pregnancy issues in regard to patients with rheumatic disease. The authors should perhaps add some information on services available for patients with rheumatic disease in other countries. When reading the narratives one cannot but feel frustrated that so much of the information that is “out there” has not reached the region in spite of being available in English language. By just using the search terms “arthritis in pregnancy” numerous articles pop up, several of them of very good quality, for example provided by the Arthritis Foundation.

3. The National Service for Pregnancy and Rheumatic disease in Trondheim, Norway has focused on the practical needs that arise after a baby is born to a parent suffering from arthritis. Early experience showed that the patients themselves have to be asked which problems they experience in caring for a baby and how they solved their problems. The booklet “Being a rheumatic mother” was based on solutions the patients themselves had found; it was published in 1994 in an English translation. Today it is distributed to patients in an updated version.

4. Information on pregnancy and child caring cannot just be copied from a foreign source; it has to be developed in a country or region on the background of the ruling health care system, the resources available in the region and the life style of the population.

5. I agree with the key message of the paper that arthritis organizations and
health care professionals should actively involve in the task to create patient accessible information on reproduction issues. The points presented on page 16, line 397-406 are particularly important. Arthritis organizations could arrange contact to peers by organizing groups – we got very positive feedback from groups of mothers and expecting mothers with rheumatic disease.

6. A final point is that awareness of pregnancy and post partum issues is needed throughout the range of health care providers. International conferences on Pregnancy and Rheumatic Disease have been arranged since 1992, and an increasing number of publications have appeared throughout the last decade. The key to improve the patient situation is to communicate the knowledge, to disseminate it and to make it accessible in every-day language to the patient. The present paper gives a voice to the patients telling health professionals what they really need to know.

Level of interest:An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English:Acceptable

Statistical review:No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests