**Abstract – Rheumatology Outpatient Clinic Backlog**

**Title:**

*Management of patients with chronic disease in a Rheumatology outpatient setting during the COVID-19 pandemic awaiting follow up appointments*

*~~How are we dealing with the outpatient “backlog” generated by disruption during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Rheumatology department?~~*

**Background**

During the COVID-19 pandemic we were unable to provide regular outpatient services for patients with chronic rheumatic diseases. A “backlog” of approximately 6800 patients on disease modifying therapies without an allocated follow up appointment accrued by September 2021. We quantified this cohort and analysed attempts to deliver care remotely.

**Methods:**

We selected a 12-month “window” May 2020-May 2021 and analysed the number of patients awaiting follow up since then. Of the ~6800 patients awaiting follow up, 3259 were within this window. We revisited how many patients remained in that cohort on 4 separate assessments between September 2021 – March 2022. We assessed how these patients progressed through our service using face-to-face, telemedicine, and using electronic remote management forms (RMFs).

**Results**

The number of patients in the window reduced from 3259 to 960 by March 2022 (71% reduction). There was no statistically significant change in the distribution of patients per month, implying the “shape” of the backlog remained similar. ~~Chi-square test for trend showed~~ There was a statistically significant, linear change in the number of patients per month across all four assessments (p<0.0000004).

Of 1956 RMFs submitted between September 2021-March 2022, only 261 recorded a previous appointment date. 154/261 (59%) were from patients in our window, indicating a preferential use of RMFs targeting backlog patients. 2-8% of patients on the backlog were managed using RMFs.

**Conclusion**

We have reduced the backlog of outpatient follow up due to COVID-19, and remote management forms make a sizeable contribution to this reduction. These results likely underestimate the effect of RMFs due to this dataset being incomplete.

**[FIGURES OVERLEAF]**

**Figures**

**Chart

Description automatically generatedFigure 1**

**Figure 2**

**Chart, bar chart

Description automatically generated**

**Table 1**

****