**Abstract – Rheumatology Outpatient Clinic Backlog**

**Title:**

*Management of the backlog of patients with chronic disease awaiting follow-up appointments in a Rheumatology outpatient setting*

**Introduction**

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 at four assessment dates between September 2021 – March 2022. We assessed how patients progressed through our service using clinics (face-to-face, telemedicine), and electronic remote management forms (RMFs).

**Results**

The number of patients in the window reduced to 960 by March 2022 (71% reduction). There was a significant, linear reduction 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 the backlog was 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

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**Figure 2**

**Chart, bar chart

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**Table 1**

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