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Effectiveness of a self-management program for joint protection and physical activity for patients with rheumatoid arthritis: A pilot study

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Background: Rheumatoid arthritis is a persistent systemic disease. Self-management skills are important for this patient population; however, a comprehensive rheumatoid arthritis self-management program for patients' day-to-day joint protection and physical activity is limited in Chinese society.

Objectives: The aim of the study was to evaluate self-management for rheumatoid arthritis patients, which focused on joint protection and improving physical activity.

Method: A pilot study with a pretest-posttest design was conducted with 32 adult rheumatoid arthritis patients at a medical center in northern Taiwan from January to July of 2016. Participants received a 6-week intervention (n=15) or usual care (n=17). Measures, at baseline and 12-weeks (outcome), included disease activity, arthritis self-efficacy, quality of life, and rheumatoid arthritis self-management behavior. Participant satisfaction and recommendations regarding the program were also collected. Analysis employed the Mann-Whitney U test.

Results: Outcomes for the intervention group improved significantly for most variables. However, only rheumatoid arthritis self-management behavior was significantly better for the intervention group compared to controls ($p < .05$). The intervention group evaluated the program as satisfactory or very satisfactory; home visits and phone calls scored highest.

Discussion: The self-management program is a feasible means of improving rheumatoid arthritis patients' self-management behavior. A trusting relationship with the researcher was important for home visits, and phone calls were helpful as reminders. These findings will be incorporated in a large-scale study for further analysis of improving outcomes of persons with rheumatoid arthritis.

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