

People at the Centre Update 6

COVID-19 impact on individuals with axial Spondyloarthritis (SpA)

Key findings from the COVID-19 and axial SpA patient survey:

- **Impact on medication:** 8% of respondents stopped taking their medication, but only 15% of those were told to do so by their health professional. 32% worried they were more at risk of infection while 27% were worried they were more at risk of serious symptoms if they were to develop COVID-19.
- **Deterioration in outcomes:** 9% found their axial SpA (AS) had improved during lockdown, for 44% it had not changed but for 47% it had got worse. Almost half of respondents said that their general health and mental health had also deteriorated in recent weeks.
- **Importance of face to face care:** Whilst many respondents welcomed the positive impact of digital services, 85% highlighted the importance of face to face care for rheumatologist appointments, and 60% said likewise for physiotherapist care.

"I would like to have 'someone' to contact if I have a question, or the facility to send an email. My only contact with the Rheumatology department is a 10 minutes appointment every 18 months or longer."

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Other key statistics were:

- 63% of people offered a virtual appointment did not attend
- 45% felt their general health had deteriorated
- 47% had worsening mental health
- 75% of individuals who needed to access services were able to
- 50% of people surveyed were very, or fairly satisfied with the level of engagement they received from health care teams during the pandemic

“I think regardless of social distancing and the pandemic, it would be useful to utilise technology more (for those who can use it comfortably) and don't require a face to face assessment.”

[Read the report: “Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Axial SpA – Patient and Clinical Survey Results Summary”](#)

A survey by Versus Arthritis also found “devastating” consequences for those with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions.

- 43% of people surveyed had appointments cancelled
- 37% did not have access to the care and treatment needed to manage their pain.

“The pain is getting worse and worse, and I can't stand for longer than ten minutes without it becoming too much.”