

Newcastle Early Arthritis Clinic - Research and Clinical Teams: Better Together

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What was the initiative?

With the development of the Newcastle Early Arthritis clinic over the last 5 years, the research and clinical teams have worked together to provide the best possible service for patients. The clinic provides rapid access to assessment and treatment for patients referred with suspected inflammatory arthritis as this is known to give them the best possible chance of achieving disease remission. They also gain awareness of their condition and are given the opportunity to participate in research by recruitment into the Early Arthritis Cohort and other studies.

What was the outcome of the initiative?

The integrated service has greatly increased the capacity for research, leading to even better care and treatments in the future. The dedicated database collects research and clinical data simultaneously, which is much more efficient for both staff and patients. Recent research points to a window of opportunity early in the disease course, as patients diagnosed and treated rapidly show less joint destruction and are more likely to achieve remission. Consensus that prompt assessment and treatment improved patient outcomes is reflected in the NICE Quality standard for rheumatoid arthritis and the Best Practice Tariff for early inflammatory arthritis.

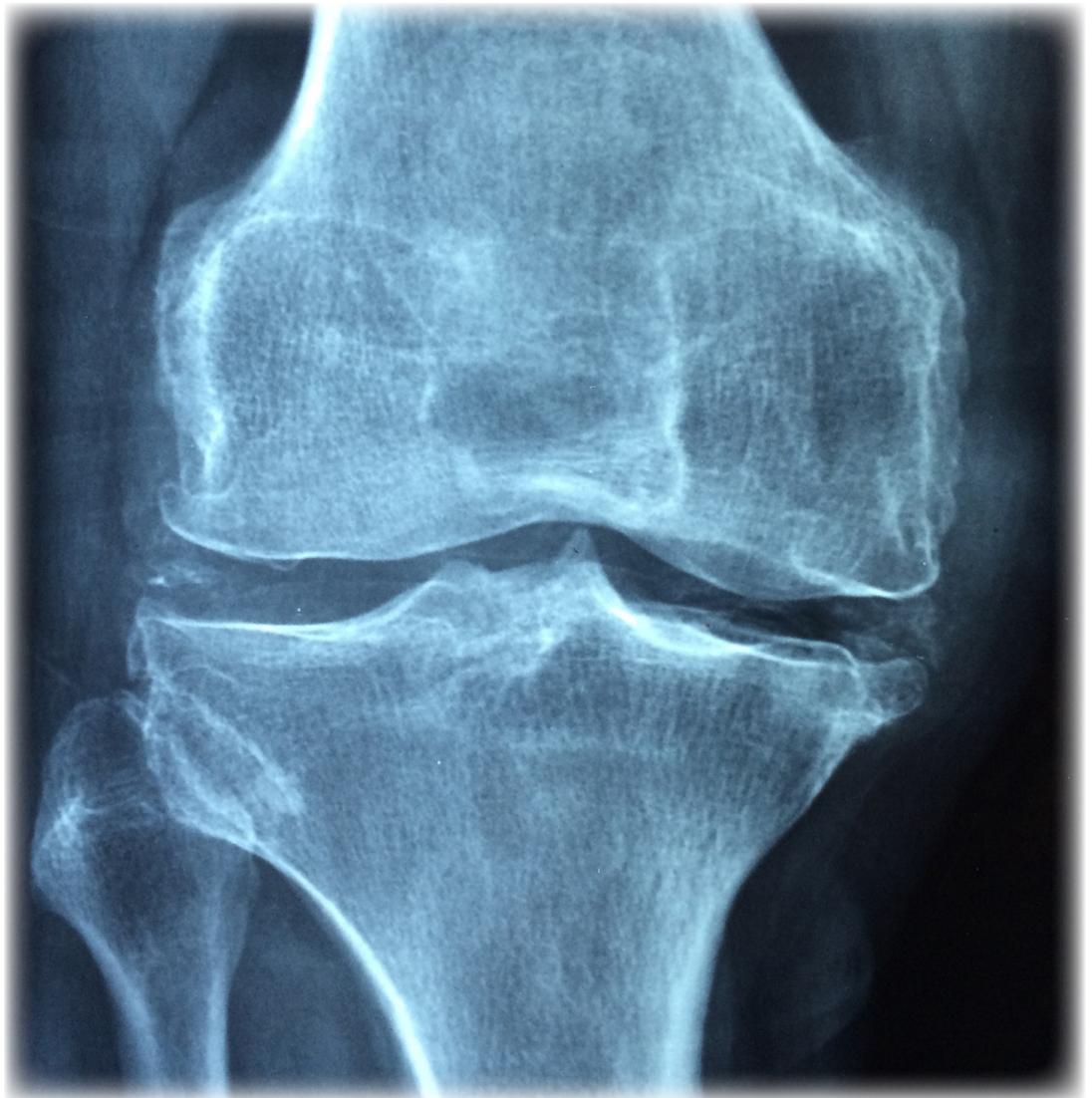
What worked well?

Transferable skills have been shared by both clinical and research personnel, and research personnel such as specialist nurses now taking informed consent, and research staff are proficient in carrying out rheumatology assessments. Relationships between the clinical and research teams have improved, with an appreciation of the challenges of each others' roles.

What were the challenges?

During the setup process all of the relevant personnel were involved in the discussion process. Initially, staff roles and responsibilities had to be refined, particularly around the administration aspect, and a staff rota had to be devised to accommodate holidays and last minute sickness.

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What improvement was required?

Increasing engagement between the clinical and research personnel was pivotal to the success of the project. It was essential that staff were aware of research and the importance of research in providing high quality care to patients, with the option of accessing cutting-edge novel treatments.

What supporting resources were required?

Time and expertise of research nurses, clinical trials associates and database managers have facilitated the development and running of the Newcastle Early Arthritis Clinic. Key features of this innovative service include:

- First appointment for data collections, tests and research invitation
- Second appointment for diagnosis and commencement of treatment
- Single database with restricted access for research and clinical staff
- Direct data input by clinicians in clinic