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Increasing public access to clinical practice guidelines for rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis

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Background: Four million Canadians, 15 years of age or older, report arthritis (2001). Arthritis is a leading cause of disability. The use of 'influential patients' is one strategy for disseminating clinical practice guidelines (CPG) to other patients.

Purpose: This project evaluated the impact of 'influential patients' with arthritis and media on dissemination and adoption of arthritis self-management strategies.

Methods: Phase I: Meta-analyses of physical rehabilitation interventions for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and osteoarthritis (OA) were used to develop 6 lay self-management guidelines. Phase II: Knowledge Translation activities: tool development, online educational materials, 2 interactive workshops. Workshop 1 (WS1) was delivered by faculty to 'influential patients' from Canadian patient organizations. In WS2, selected trained patients delivered the same content to a new group of patients. Attendees were assessed at baseline, post-workshop and 3 months follow-up. General public was invited to use an online learning module. Participants were assessed on knowledge; intent to use and application of arthritis self-management strategies; self-efficacy measured on a scale from 1 to 10; and their dissemination activities were tracked.

Results: 23 'influential' people with OA or RA attended WS1. 9/23 were trained to deliver workshop content to 27 new participants. 21/23 (WS1) and 25/27 (WS2) completed post-workshop surveys. 3-month follow-up surveys showed improved knowledge and increased use of Transcutaneous Electric Nerve Stimulation, Tai Chi and shoe inserts ($p < 0.01$; $n = 49$). Self-efficacy improved for both groups. Information was shared by WS1 participants with: family members, friends and their organizations. They reported being better able to meet the educational needs of people with arthritis ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) and to access up-to-date resources ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). 140 people logged on to the public survey site and completed baseline surveys.

Discussion: This innovative knowledge translation project demonstrates the positive impact of influential patients and the media on the use and dissemination of arthritis self-management strategies.