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Treatment Modes in Rheumatoid Arthritis: Factors Influencing Patient Preference

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BACKGROUND: Little in-depth qualitative research has been conducted to investigate reasons for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patient (pt) preferences for different modes of treatment administration. An understanding of pt preference can help physicians personalise therapy recommendations for their pts.

OBJECTIVES: To describe potential RA pt preferences for RA treatment modes and reasons for these preferences.

METHODS: Pt demographic information was obtained at screening alongside qualitative interviews conducted using a semi-structured interview guide among adult RA pts in the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Brazil who were currently taking a DMARD (biologic or non-biologic). A 100-point allocation task was used to evaluate the strength of preference (0–100; 100 = strong) across 4 treatment modes: oral (OR; once daily), self-injection (SI; weekly), clinic-injection (CI; weekly) and infusion (INF; monthly). Transcripts were developed in English; ATLAS.ti software (v7.5) was used for qualitative coding and analysis.

RESULTS: 100 interviews (30 US; 10 in each of 7 other countries) were conducted (female: 75.0%; mean age: 53.9 yrs; mean time since diagnosis: 11.6 yrs). Current RA medication mode included OR (60.0%), injection (57.0%) and INF (14.0%); 79.0% and 37.0% of pts had experience with injection and INF medications, respectively; 31.0% of pts were taking a combination of biologic and non-biologic DMARDs. Among the 4 treatment modes, OR was allocated the highest mean (standard deviation [SD]) preference points (47.3 [33.1]) and the greatest percentage of pts with a 1st choice rank (57.0%); this was followed by SI (29.7 [27.7]; 29.0%), INF (15.4 [24.6]; 16.0%) and CI (7.5 [14.1]; 2.0%). Preferences by country suggested that the mean points allocated to OR were greater in the US vs other countries. Across all pts and treatment modes, 56.0% of pts had a ‘strong’ 1st choice preference (ie, a pt allocation $\geq$ the mean pts across the 1st ranked choices [70]); of these pts, the majority chose OR (62.5%; SI: 23.2%; INF: 10.7%; CI: 3.6%). Speed of administration was among the most common reasons for choosing OR or SI as a 1st choice, together with ease of administration (OR) and frequency of dosing (SI; Table). Difficulty remembering was the most common reason for not choosing OR and avoidance of pain was the most common reason for not choosing SI as a 1st choice.

CONCLUSIONS: More pts preferred OR as an RA treatment mode, followed by SI. Rationales for preference included ease of use, safety concerns, dosing frequency, feelings of control and avoidance of pain and needles. While 56.0% of pts felt strongly about their 1st choice preference, nearly half did not and may be receptive to and benefit from discussions with their healthcare professional and/or pt support groups about RA treatment mode options.

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Table. Most frequent^a reasons for choosing or not choosing each treatment mode as 1st choice

Reasons for choosing OR, n (%) (N=57)		Reasons for not choosing OR, n (%) (N=43)	
Speed of administration	30 (52.6)	Difficulty remembering	15 (34.9)
Ease of administration	30 (52.6)	Possible drug-drug interactions	11 (25.6)
Portability	23 (40.4)		
Reasons for choosing SI, n (%) (N=29)		Reasons for not choosing SI, n (%) (N=71)	
Speed of administration	16 (55.2)	Avoidance of pain due to needles	33 (46.5)
Frequency of dosing	12 (41.4)	Avoidance of needles	30 (42.3)
Having a feeling of control	11 (37.9)	Difficulties when traveling	19 (26.8)
		Need to refrigerate	18 (25.4)
Reasons for choosing CI,^b n (%) (N=10)		Reasons for not choosing CI,^c n (%) (N=100)	
Feels comfortable with experts administering	4 (40.0)	Need to go to the clinic	38 (38.0)
Prefers someone else to administer	3 (30.0)	Inconvenience	36 (36.0)
Reasons for choosing INF, n (%) (N=16)		Reasons for not choosing INF, n (%) (N=84)	
Frequency of dosing	13 (81.3)	Time-consuming	51 (60.7)
Feelings of safety and care	5 (31.3)	Hassle and inconvenience	28 (33.3)
		Need to go to the clinic	26 (31.0)

^aReported by $\geq 25\%$ of patients; ^bN includes 2 patients who chose CI as clear 1st choice and 8 patients who chose CI as clear 2nd choice; ^cBased on total sample

CI, clinic-injection; INF, infusion; OR, oral; SI, self-injection