218. A QUALITATIVE APPROACH: EXPLORING THE EXERCISE BEHAVIOUR IN ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS PATIENTS ON ANTI-TNF ALPHA MEDICATION

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Background: Ankylosing spondylitis affects the axial skeleton, causing characteristic inflammatory back pain, leading to structural and functional impairments. Exercise has traditionally been an important part of the treatment in order to maintain spinal mobility. Anti-TNFα medication has been proven highly effective in treating the condition. Over recent years some evidence has emerged suggesting a synergistic effect between anti-TNFα medication and exercise. However, there is minimal evidence on the perceptions of AS patients on how the medication has affected their exercise behaviour.

Methods: A purposive sample of AS patients who had been on the anti-TNFα medication for over a year was recruited from the rheumatology department of a local hospital. A qualitative approach was adopted to provide a holistic understanding of participants’ exercise behaviour whilst on anti-TNFα medication. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using thematic network analysis. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained.

Results: Twenty AS participants (3 females, 17 males, age range 26–74, disease duration 3–36 years, medication duration 1–8 years) participated. Three themes were identified, the main one being exercise behaviour, within which four sub themes were identified: Enthusiasm and keenness for sporting activities described how enthusiastic and active with sports the participants had been prior to their diagnosis. Inconsistency and inability to exercise illustrated the participants’ experiences and feelings as their condition deteriorated so that they could not pursue their usual activities and exercise programmes. Incentives and elation of exercising provided an insight into the incentives for the participants chosen activities and the motivation which influenced them to exercise. It highlights the feelings of achievement and the wellbeing emphasizing the importance of the anti-TNFα medication and exercise having to go together. Variations in undertaking physiotherapy exercises showed how participants undertook their physiotherapy stretches before and after the medication and how individuals adapted them to be of benefit to themselves. Overall, anti-TNFα medication alleviated the AS symptoms enabling the participants to recommence physical activities, including previous and new sports and to embrace their physiotherapy exercises.

Conclusion: This study has provided evidence of the long term effects of anti-TNFα medication on the exercise behaviour of AS patients. It has shown that AS patients are able to sustain a regular exercise programme over a long period of time due to the effects of the anti-TNFα medication. It has provided an insight into what motivates them to exercise and the incentives that have influenced their choice of exercise.
activity. It can be recommended that AS patients require regular reviews in order to maintain their motivation for exercise.

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