I13. HOW THE FOOT IS AFFECTED BY RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS AND NON-SURGICAL MANAGEMENT OPTIONS AVAILABLE

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As foot specialists, the podiatry profession has skills to assess lower limb vascular, neurological, dermatological and musculoskeletal issues which underpin treatment for those with health issues such as RA that can lead to tissue compromise and joint pathology. This presentation will outline the range of common pathologies affecting the rheumatoid foot and focus on the role of the podiatrist in non-surgical management and implementing standards of care for comprehensive foot health management. Podiatrists are involved in screening and monitoring of the foot systems and education of patients to improve awareness of the range of foot pathologies to facilitate early detection and treatment. The emphasis on prophylactic treatment in early
disease aims to maintain tissue viability and preserve lower limb function. Reducing mechanical overload on the foot with specific footwear, functional foot orthoses, splints and exercise therapy to improve strength and alignment helps to serve this aim. In more established manifestations, accommodative orthoses are provided and, depending on local arrangements, pain relief with the use of acupuncture, low-level laser and steroid injections are offered. Treatment of nail and skin conditions, common with rheumatological conditions, is emphasized to preserve tissue viability and prevent secondary issues that may develop due to increased infection risk from immunocompromise. As part of the multidisciplinary team, podiatrists generally receive referrals from Rheumatology and are also well placed to pick up undiagnosed cases of RA in the community. Podiatrists often link with physiotherapy and have a key role in referral of established cases for bespoke footwear or foot surgery.

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