174. ANSWERING PROFESSOR BLACK’S CHALLENGE: HOW MANY RHEUMATOLOGY OUTPATIENTS ARE PARTICIPATING IN WORK?

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Background: Musculoskeletal disorders are one of the two major causes of incapacity for work in the UK costing an estimated 0.5–2% gross domestic product. Historically, conditions such as RA were associated with very poor workplace retention rates. At British Society for Rheumatology 2014, Professor Dame Carol Black challenged rheumatologists to pay greater attention to the work status of our patients.

Methods: During a 2-week period of July 2014, patients attending a large rheumatology service either as day cases or as outpatients were
surveyed about their current work status, their reasons for leaving employment (where applicable) and advice received/given about work capacity by rheumatology staff, general practitioner (GPs), occupational health services and/or employers.

Results: In total, 193 completed surveys were received. 137 (71%) were female and mean age was 53.7 years (range 16–87). 186 (96%) had ever had a paid job but 80/193 (45%) were currently employed or self-employed, 4 were in full-time education and 7 were housewives/carers. 54 (28%) reported that they had given up a paid job mainly or partly because of their rheumatological condition. Among these, fewer than 50% reported that occupational health advice was available to them; one-third reported that they had sought advice from their GP or hospital doctor about their work and 25% reported that their employer had taken advice about their work prior to them stopping. The majority of the younger workforce loss was attributable to inflammatory arthritis. Among those still in paid work, half reported that they had been asked about their work in their clinic appointment but only one-third were asked if they were having difficulty at work and fewer than 25% had been offered advice about work.

Conclusion: We found that many rheumatology outpatients are no longer in paid work and a significant proportion of these blame their arthritis. To take up Professor Black’s challenge, rheumatologists need to ask about work issues and be prepared to signpost workers to advice and support for their ongoing employment.

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