

"Practitioner Substitution"

Replacing a retiring Consultant Rheumatologist with an appropriately skilled Consultant Physiotherapist: A twelve month evaluation

purpose

The role of the Advanced Practice Physiotherapist has been well established in our Rheumatology team for more than 10 years. However, following the semi-retirement of one of the medical consultants there has been an option to pilot Consultant-level Physiotherapy input to the Rheumatology team. This process of using allied health professionals to replace medics has been called "Practitioner Substitution" and is seen as an important part of improving care and patient outcomes whilst delivering the efficiencies the NHS needs. The aims of the pilot Consultant post were: to independently manage and streamline the pathway for the non-inflammatory / pain service in Rheumatology, to reduce wait times and to ensure a more inflammatory-heavy caseload for the remaining Rheumatology medical team.

results

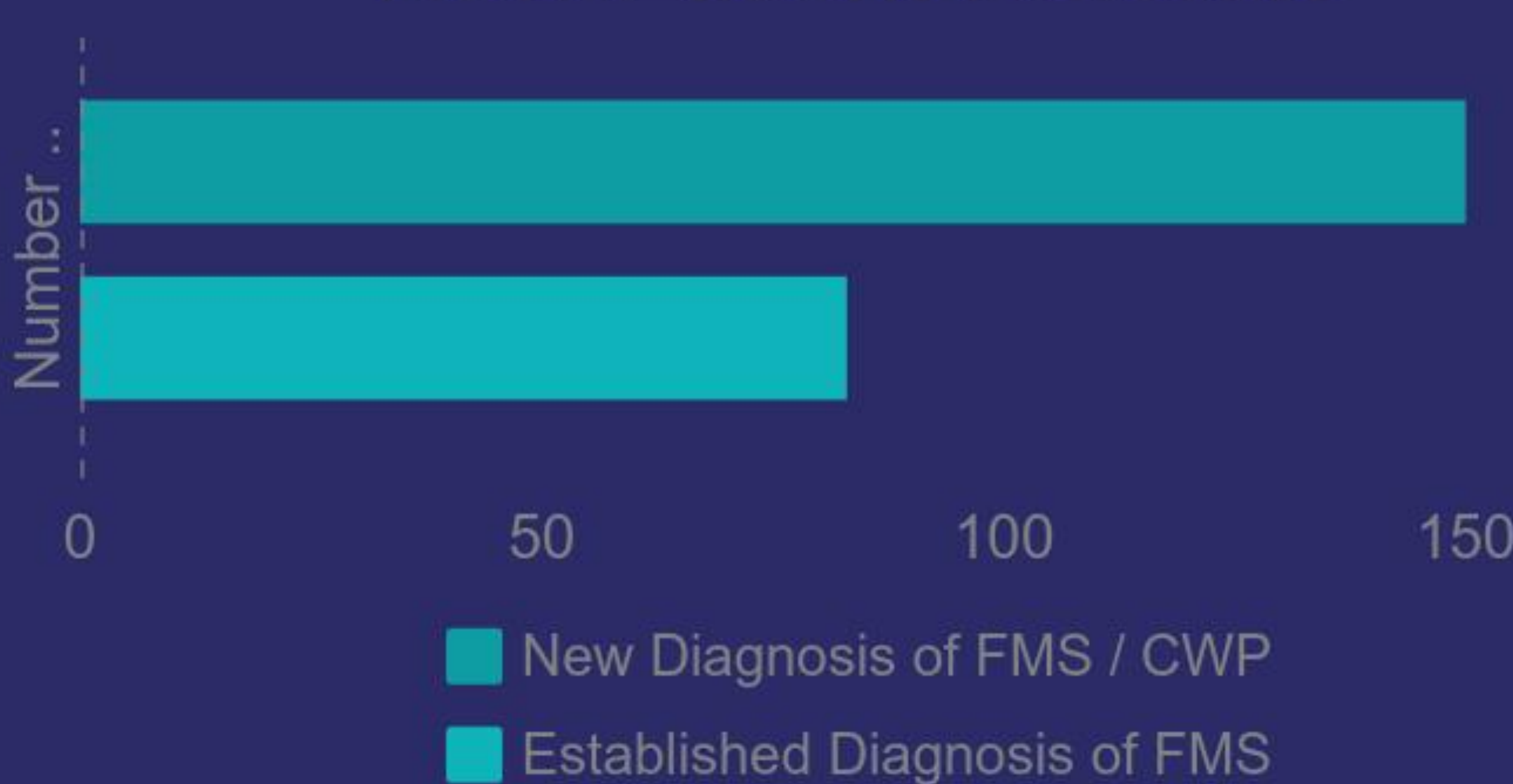
Since the start of the pilot the physiotherapist has seen 204 new patients who would have previously been seen by a consultant rheumatologist. Five patients have been transferred to the early inflammatory arthritis service, 4 have been referred to the endocrinology chronic fatigue service, and 5 have needed referral to the Pain Centre for more intensive, multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment. Eighty-three patients have received a new diagnosis of fibromyalgia, made using clinical judgement and the 2010 American College of Rheumatology diagnostic criteria. A similar number of patients with established fibromyalgia have had a fresh assessment, with new management plans agreed. Thirty seven patients have been discharged after initial assessment (with an updated, agreed management plan). Numbers of fibromyalgia patients in the general Rheumatology clinics have decreased, down from 10 a week to 1 or 2 per week. Patient feedback has been consistently good or very good. An unexpected benefit of this pilot has been a drop of referrals to physiotherapy due to patients accessing this input in their rheumatology new patient appointment.

Outcomes of New Patients Seen



- Follow Up (68.61%)
- One stop (16.59%)
- Inflammatory pathway (3.59%)
- Chronic fatigue referral (4.48%)
- Pain centre referral (6.73%)

New Patient Referrals



conclusions

Practitioner substitution offers a route to financial efficient improved patient care and outcomes. Appropriate triage has enabled a suitably trained and qualified physiotherapist to take over this cohort of non-inflammatory new patients. The SOP has allowed appropriate management of the patients and both timely handover of those needing care in other parts of the rheumatology team and referral to other specialities.

implications

For patient benefit, staff satisfaction and financial prudence it is wise to use the right clinician in the right service. This pilot has shown that a suitably trained physiotherapist can manage a non-inflammatory rheumatology cohort of patients (replacing a medical consultant post) and appropriately identify those patients requiring management elsewhere.

ACR Fibromyalgia Diagnostic Questionnaire

(1) Widespread Pain Index
Please indicate if you have had pain or tenderness during the past 7 days in the areas shown

Check the boxes in the diagramme for each area in which you have had pain or tenderness
(1 point per check box, score range 0-19 points)

Score /19

(2) Symptom Severity
For each symptom listed below, use the following scale to indicate the severity of the symptom during the past 7 days.

No problem
Slight or mild problem: generally mild or intermittent
Moderate problem: considerable problems; often present and/or at moderate level
Severe problem: continuous, life-disturbing problems

	No problem	Slight or mild problem	Moderate problem	Severe problem
Fatigue				
Trouble thinking or remembering				
Waking up tired (unrefreshed)				
Points	0	1	2	3

During the past 6 months have you had any of the following symptoms?

Pain or cramps in the lower abdomen		
Depression		
Headache		
Points	0	1

Score /12