Healthcare professionals - Northern Ireland

WE ARE







VERSUS ARTHRITIS

We are here to support people with musculoskeletal conditions.

Introduction

Our vision at Versus Arthritis is a world that no longer tolerates the impact of arthritis. We work with healthcare professionals, volunteers, researchers and friends to do everything we can to push back against arthritis.

Our patient insight tells us how important interactions with healthcare professionals are to the lived experience of people with arthritis. We offer a range of training, resources and support services to healthcare professionals to support you and your continued professional development.

We can also offer a range of support and resources to your patients. This leaflet is a summary of what we can offer in Northern Ireland. If there's anything you wish to discuss further, please reach out to the teams detailed in each section.

Contents

Adult services 3

Young people and family services 7

Education and training 8

Decision support tools 9

Physical activity support and resources 10

Policy and campaigning 11

Adult services

Self-management courses

Our accredited self-management courses are aimed at adults living with all forms of persistent pain and long-term health conditions.

Courses are led by accredited training volunteers one or both of whom live with long-term conditions and/or persistent pain themselves. Volunteers bring an understanding of what it is like to live with a long-term medical condition that can have a devastating impact on quality of life, mental health and emotional wellbeing both for the individual and their family.

We focus on the common impacts of long-term conditions as opposed to the individual conditions themselves. This cycle of impacts can include:

- fatigue
- restricted movement
- poor sleep
- difficult emotions
- stress and anxiety.

Our courses are delivered weekly over two or six weeks for 2.5 hours per session, and cover topics such as:

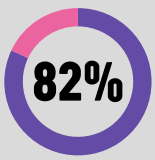
- techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, isolation and poor sleep
- appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility and endurance
- appropriate use of medications
- communicating effectively with family, friends and health professionals
- nutrition
- pacing activity and rest
- how to evaluate new treatments
- action planning, goal setting and problem solving.

> “These past six weeks have helped me. I enjoy making action plans and seeing achievements now.”

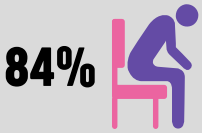
Each week, participants are supported by the course leaders to set their own action plan to begin making positive changes in their lives.

The peer support element of the programme is an essential part of its success, giving people the opportunity to meet with others who face similar challenges and issues.

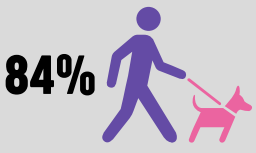
> “It was good to be able to share and listen with others in the same position. I found the information given was very useful. It has helped me to take a different view on my illness and helped me cope better.”



reported a definite improvement in the levels of pain they were experiencing by the end of the course.



stated that their ability to manage fatigue had improved from taking part in the course.



told us they felt that pain wasn’t interfering as much in their day to day lives as it had been when they started the course.

Adult services

Course content has been fully adapted to be delivered online via Microsoft Teams (accessible via smartphone, tablet or laptop). Moving forward we plan to offer a blend of face-to-face and online courses to recognise the importance of in-person contact. Patients will have choice in how they would like to access delivery.

We provide support to help participants use Microsoft Teams and where they are unable to (due to lack of digital access), we can support them to join via phone (audio only). All course materials will either be emailed or posted to participants.

On completion of each course we offer a pathway of services, including the potential to join virtual peer groups where possible to support people to continue to practice self-management behaviours.

> "I no longer feel isolated – there is help out there. These past six weeks have helped me so much and I can work with healthcare professionals with confidence now."

Course impact is based on both qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. Chronic Disease Self Efficacy Scale – see: **selfmanagementresource.com**) , alongside informal feedback and engagement evaluating qualitative feedback to measure improvement in the following areas:

- productivity
- normality of life
- recreation/social life
- emotional support
- communication with HCPs
- management of fatigue
- management of mental health
- proactive pain management
- activity levels
- pain levels
- pain interference.

To find out more about the evidence behind our self-management format, see:

https://www.selfmanagementresource.com/programs/small-group/chronic-pain-self-management/

To refer someone to our self-management courses:'

Click to complete our **online referral form**, or scan the QR code below. Once you have completed the form, you'll receive an automated acknowledgement.

Adult services

Virtual information talks

Based on the feedback of our service participants and volunteers, we are now delivering an exciting series of online talks and information sessions in partnership with a range of health professionals and voluntary sector organisations via Microsoft Teams. The talks will focus on topics such as self-care, dealing with fatigue, benefits advice and much more. Talks are designed to meet the information and signposting needs of people living with pain, and will be advertised and open to the public as a one-off or ongoing opportunity.

Groups and branches

Feeling supported, understood and independent are all important aspects of living well with arthritis. Branches and groups give people the opportunity to meet other people with arthritis in their community, share experiences and learn from others. Programme activities range from exercise classes to learning useful techniques for living with arthritis or simply having a cup of tea and getting to know people. We have a range of branches and groups across Northern Ireland that have continued to meet virtually, and we are always keen to set up more in response to need.

Social media and online resources

We have Northern Ireland and UK-wide social media presence across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

www.twitter.com/nivarthritis
www.instagram.com/niversusarthritis
www.facebook.com/northernirelandversusarthritis

We use these platforms to update and communicate with our existing contacts and reach out to new audiences who need our support. We have also adapted and tailored our content to try and provide an appropriate level of resources and outreach in place of our face–to-face services such as information hubs.

Information hubs

Having a musculoskeletal (MSK) condition can be isolating. Our information hubs were established in response to the fact that one in five GP appointments relate MSK issues, and to recognise the holistic support patients need at all levels of their journey.

Our information hubs operate monthly or fortnightly in a range of healthcare settings such as outpatient rheumatology clinics, or primary care. Hub sessions are two to three hours long in duration but are flexible to people's needs. Volunteers living with MSK issues provide Versus Arthritis resource materials on conditions, and what patients can do to support themselves and others.

Hubs crucially provide direct referral and signposting for patients and the public into our one-to-one or group services, or external support services. We also aim to assist with health literacy and patients' access to information and understanding of their condition.

The peer support and empathy provided by the volunteers can encourage patients to engage with self-management. *Hubs will resume once Covid-19 guidelines allow.*

One-to-one outreach

Our one-to-one service is aimed at individuals who cannot currently attend our online or face-to-face group courses, who feel isolated and are living with pain. A trained volunteer speaks to the individual once a week for four weeks, introducing them to self-management techniques to help them live positively with their condition.

Adult services

The ultimate aim of the service is to introduce the individual to the tools they need to manage and encourage them to progress to another group or Versus Arthritis service based on peer support.

> "The techniques they have empowered me with are part of my everyday routine now. I would be interested in some evening group courses to learn and share with people like me re: coping mechanisms for daily life."

Physical activity

We are enhancing our organisation-wide physical activity offer and are developing a range of MSK friendly physical activity sessions such as Chi Mi and walking groups.

We will be partnering with local experts to train volunteers to deliver the sessions to both our groups, service participants and the general public. Chi Mi is already being delivered online via Microsoft Teams, and our walking groups will be established in line with our return to face-to-face services.

Patient voice

The service supports both healthcare professionals in training and in practice to understand and empathise with what it is to have and live with a musculoskeletal (MSK) condition and/or persistent pain, and ultimately improve the service they provide to patients. We also integrate signposting and referral information for Versus Arthritis resources, services and professional network as an addition to these sessions to complete the approach.

> "The students found the volunteers to be inspirational; this was a highlight of this module."

Patient voice sessions can take place online, with students and practitioners conducting mock consultations, structured conversations and pre-recorded video diaries or interviews with course or professional development leads. All partnerships are co-designed with the educator, students and volunteers.

Partners have so far included Queen's University Belfast (QUB) School of Medicine, Ulster University School of Pharmacy, QUB School of Pharmacy, GP training in chronic pain, Ulster University Physiotherapy.

> "Thank you so much for your contribution to enhancement of the student learning experience here at Ulster University."

We can also support health and social care trust quality improvement projects to provide the patient perspective in co-producing potential solutions for patients living with MSK and persistent pain issues.

How to refer to Adult Services

Find out more or refer to any of our NI adult services via **niservicesteam@versusarthritis.org** and we will contact the referred individual to provide the service to suit their needs.

Young people and family services

If you have a patient up to the age of 25 years with a diagnosis of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) or another MSK condition, did you know that you can refer them to the Young People and Families Service within Versus Arthritis?

The Young People and Families Service offers a range of support services for young people with arthritis and MSK conditions and their families across the UK.

Young people tell us that sometimes their friendships, school life and family life have been affected by their diagnosis, and coming along to one of our events has given them the opportunity to rebuild confidence in themselves and manage their condition better. Frequent hospital appointments and time off work, school or university take away independence and can limit choices.

All events are run with our volunteers who themselves have grown up with arthritis or similar conditions. Sometimes simply talking to others the same age who are going through the same things, can make a massive difference.

Our support events range from one-to-one support (we have access to a range of resources and relationships we can avail of to help here), to day events covering topics such as pain management, the importance of pacing and transition.

We run an adulting workshop led by younger people with arthritis answering common questions that other young people have about school, university, relationships, medication and travelling.

There are also volunteer opportunities that enable young people to develop skills and enhance their experience in order to strengthen their applications to higher education. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic we have also delivered a range of virtual events to support young people and their families online during a pause in our face-to-face services.

How to refer to our YPFS services

You can use this referral form – **http://bit.ly/HealthProfessionalsVA**

or email **YPFSNI@versusarthritis.org** to find out more.

1 IN 1,000

young people under the age of 16 are diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic arthritis

OVER 600

young people under 16 live with pain, fatigue, mobility problems and joint damage from arthritis

Education and training

The Professional Engagement team at Versus Arthritis can provide resources, education and support that will help you to help people with arthritis.

Information

When you join our **professional network**, you'll become part of a growing community of healthcare professionals dedicated to pushing back against arthritis. We'll keep you up to date on the latest developments in MSK health and care, and share practical tips, development opportunities and resources.

Education and training

Our **Core Skills in Musculoskeletal Care** programme helps primary healthcare professionals build confidence in diagnosing and supporting people with MSK conditions. The programme consists of an e-learning course designed in partnership with the Royal College of General Practitioners, as well as digital and practical workshops which are delivered across the UK. Core Skills will help you master the basics of examinations and consultations.

Get access to free, **high-quality webinars** designed for GPs and other healthcare providers who diagnose and manage MSK conditions. Together with the medical education provider Red Whale, we've created these webinars to help you deliver the best care.

Our Guide to the **Clinical Assessment of Patients with Musculoskeletal Conditions** is endorsed by the British Society for Rheumatology and the British Orthopaedic Association. This guide gives you a step-by-step approach to assessing people with MSK conditions.

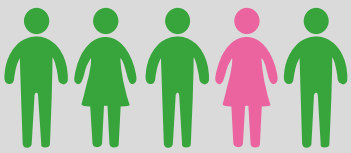
Leadership development

Our **MSK Champions Programme**, developed in partnership with the Ashridge Business School, helps empower leaders in MSK care. In this programme, we support our champions to implement service improvement projects at a local or national level.

Our resources

- Professional network
- Core Skills in Musculoskeletal Care
- Versus Arthritis Red Whale webinars
- Clinical assesment guide
- MSK Champions Programme

For more information on any of these services, please get in touch at ProfessionalEngagement@versusarthritis.org



Each year one in five people consult a GP about a musculoskeletal condition.

OVER 9,000

We have over 8,000 people in our professional network.



37,000

Our resources and training products were accessed by healthcare professionals over 37,000 times in 20/21.'

Decision support tools

Versus Arthritis has produced a suite of support tools to help people with back, shoulder, hip and knee pain. They were developed by Versus Arthritis with support from the Primary Care Centre Versus Arthritis at Keele University and funding from NHS England, and are endorsed by NICE.

(National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, December 2020.)

These decision support tools accurately reflect recommendations in the NICE guidance on osteoarthritis and low back pain and sciatica in over 16s. They also support statements 1–7 in the NICE quality standard for osteoarthritis and statements 2–7 in the NICE quality standard for low back pain and sciatica in over 16s.

How to use the tools

The tools are designed to support consultations between patients and their healthcare professionals. They are a set of questions which encourage people to think about what types of support they need to help them with their musculoskeletal health problem.

Patients can use these to prepare for appointments, during appointments, or both. Each tool sets out the treatment options for that condition and summarises what is known about the potential benefits and risks of each option. They are intended to facilitate discussion, not to guide people towards a particular option.

For more information about the tools and how they were developed, please visit: **www.versusarthritis.org/DST**

Our resources

There are eight tools, all available to download as PDFs:

- **Making decisions about my back pain: primary care and self-care**
- **Making decisions about my back pain: thinking about a referral**
- **Making decisions about my shoulder pain: primary care and self-care**
- **Making decisions about my shoulder pain: thinking about a referral**
- **Making decisions about my hip pain: primary care and self-care**
- **Making decisions about my hip pain: thinking about a referral**
- **Making decisions about my knee pain: primary care and self-care**
- **Making decisions about my knee pain: thinking about a referral**

Physical activity

Research shows us that engaging in physical activity reduces pain, improves quality of life and strengthens the muscles and joints. Versus Arthritis is facilitating a way for people to incorporate movement into their everyday lives, empowering people with musculoskeletal conditions to reclaim activity at a level that is right for them.

Versus Arthritis has spent 12 months listening to people with arthritis and understanding their **barriers and facilitators** to exercise. In 2019, we surveyed over 800 people with MSK conditions from across the UK. We are using the evidence of what works to inform our **support groups** activity menu, including evidence-based interventions such as **ESCAPE-pain**. Our physical activity expert advisers are helping to shape our offer, including world leading experts from our **Centre for Sport, Exercise and Osteoarthritis Research.**

Let's Move is our new digital programme tailor-made for people with arthritis to help them on their physical activity journey. We are developing a series of videos featuring experts and people with lived experience of arthritis. There will be myth-busting blogs, animations, podcasts and live streams. These will be shared on our social media channels as well as by our **virtual assistant**. As part of our **online community**, people with arthritis can make connections with people who are on the same journey and get expert advice.

Our resources

- Our **exercise page** includes trusted information, leaflets, **guidance** and support to answer any questions people may have around exercise and **pain management.**
- Our **'We are Undefeatable'** resources are enabling people to build physical activity into their lives, in a way that their condition allows.
- **Physical activity** policy position
- Guidance for commissioners **Providing Physical Activity** Interventions for people with MSK conditions

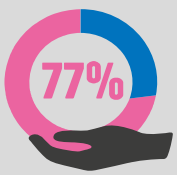
For more information on any of these services or working in partnership, please get in touch with the Versus Arthritis Physical Activity team at: PhysicalActivityVA@versusarthritis.org



people with MSK conditions would like to be more active.



Over half say that they would find it difficult to become more active.



wanted greater practical support, such as tips around physical activity and pain management.



Over half would like it if there were more activities to do at home.

Policy and campaigning

The pain of MSK conditions affects all aspects of life - the ability to work, care for a family, to move free from pain and to live independently. Yet, in society, arthritis is often dismissed as an inevitable part of aging or shrugged off as 'just a bit of arthritis'. Alongside volunteers, healthcare professionals and decision makers we campaign relentlessly for arthritis to be seen as a priority.

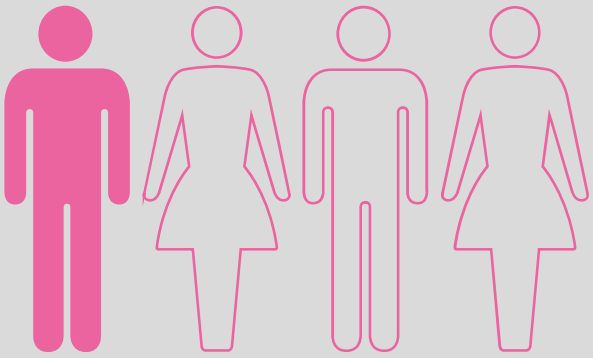
On a practical level our policy and influencing activity aims to be part of the solution to making health and social care for people with arthritis and related conditions in Northern Ireland the best it can be. Using Versus Arthritis' insight into the patient experience of living with MSK conditions and your experience of the challenges and innovation in health and social care, we can work together to shape policy, influence government and improve patient outcomes.

Responding to consultations, convening focus groups, participating in panels and working groups, and facilitating discussion across health and social care, our policy and public affairs team is here to support and influence health and social care provision.

Our resources

Contact us at NIPolicy@versusarthritis.org or visit **Campaign with us** to find out more or support our activities

Join our Campaigns Network at: **versusarthritis.org**

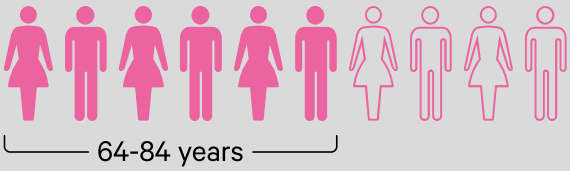


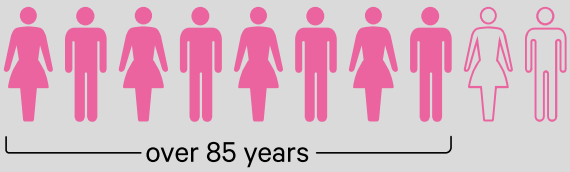
ONE IN FOUR

people are living with two or more long-term conditions

THE PREVALENCE

of multimorbidity increases from around 6 in 10 aged 64-84 years to 8 in 10 aged 85 years or over





We're the 10 million people living with arthritis. We're the carers, researchers, professionals, friends, runners and bakers all united by our goal to challenge arthritis. We refuse to accept arthritis stealing the fundamentals of life from us. Together, we're making real headway, and we'll never stop until no one has to tolerate living with the pain, fatigue or isolation of arthritis.

FOLLOW US

For more information please visit our **website**
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