

## NURSING CHALLENGES IN WORKING WITH RHEUMATOLOGY PATIENTS

O. I. Zarudna<sup>1</sup>, O. S. Makhovska<sup>2</sup>, S. V. Danchak<sup>1</sup>, N. I. Reha<sup>1</sup>, I. K. Venher<sup>1</sup>,  
N. L. Korpusova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I. Horbachevsky Ternopil National Medical University

<sup>2</sup>Communal Non-Profit Enterprise "Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital" of the Ternopil Regional Council

**Introduction.** Rheumatological diseases are common worldwide and their number is increasing. These conditions require comprehensive, interdisciplinary care, in which nurses play an important role through their involvement in the process. Despite the developed algorithms for working with patients, only half of them remain satisfied with the treatment process and communication with staff. A survey of Japanese nurses working with rheumatological patients, conducted in 2020, identified five main problems: communication, understanding, experience, systemic problems and collaboration. However, there are no such studies conducted among Ukrainian nurses.

**The aim of the study** – to learn about nursing challenges in working with rheumatology patients using statistical study of the patient contingent of the rheumatology department, analysis of the structure and staffing of a model rheumatology department, analysis of questionnaires of rheumatology department nurses about the peculiarities of work in the rheumatology department, oral interview with rheumatology department nurses.

**The main part.** In 2024, the rheumatology department of the Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital treated 1,725 patients with rheumatic diseases. The vast majority of them had joint manifestations. 9 experienced nurses are involved in the work with them, who are involved in registration, care, fulfillment of prescriptions, monitoring and self-care teaching of patients. Nurses face such problems as a large volume of patients, communication problems, organizational difficulties and emotional burnout.

**Conclusions.** Rheumatological diseases are widespread throughout the world. Therefore, the rheumatology department of the Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital works with a large flow of rheumatological patients. Experienced nurses are involved in their care, who have outlined the main problems in their work.

**Keywords:** rheumatological diseases; rheumatology patients; nurses.

## МЕДСЕСТРИНСЬКІ ВИКЛИКИ В РОБОТІ З РЕВМАТОЛОГІЧНИМИ ПАЦІЄНТАМИ

O. I. Зарудна<sup>1</sup>, O. S. Маховська<sup>2</sup>, S. V. Даньчак<sup>1</sup>, N. I. Рега<sup>1</sup>, I. K. Венгер<sup>1</sup>,  
N. L. Корпусова<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Тернопільський національний медичний університет  
імені І. Я. Горбачевського МОЗ України

<sup>2</sup>КНП «Тернопільська обласна клінічна лікарня» Тернопільської обласної ради

**Вступ.** Ревматологічні захворювання поширені в усьому світі, їх кількість зростає. Ці стани вимагають комплексного, міждисциплінарного догляду, в якому медсестри відіграють важливу роль через зацікавленість до процесу. Незважаючи на розроблені алгоритми роботи з пацієнтами, лише половина з них залишається задоволеною процесом лікування та спілкуванням із персоналом. Завдяки опитуванню японських медсестер, які працюють з ревматологічними пацієнтами, проведенню в 2020 р., було виявлено п'ять основних проблем в їх роботі, таких, як: комунікація, розуміння, досвід, системні проблеми та співпраця з пацієнтами. Проте досліджень, сфокусованих на важливих питаннях роботи медсестер стаціонарних відділень в Україні, недостатньо.

**Мета роботи** – дослідити медсестринські виклики в роботі з ревматологічними пацієнтами за допомогою статистичного дослідження контингенту хворих ревматологічного відділення, аналізу структури та штатного розкладу медсестер ревматологічного відділення, аналізу анкет та усного інтерв'ю медсестер щодо особливостей роботи ревматологічного відділення.

**Основна частина.** У 2024 р. в ревматологічному відділенні КНП «Тернопільська обласна клінічна лікарня» Тернопільської обласної ради перебували на лікуванні 1725 пацієнтів з різними захворюваннями. Більшість з них мала суглобові прояви. До роботи з ними було залучено 9 медсестер із тривалим

досвідом роботи саме у ревматологічному відділенні. В їх обов'язки входять реєстрація та облік пацієнтів, їх догляд, виконання призначень, моніторинг стану хворих і навчання пацієнтів. За результатами анкетування та аналізу усного інтерв'ю, медсестри стикаються з такими проблемами, як великий потік пацієнтів, комунікаційні та організаційні труднощі, емоційне вигорання.

**Висновки.** Ревматологічні захворювання поширені в усьому світі. Тому й ревматологічне відділення Тернопільської обласної клінічної лікарні працює з великим потоком ревматологічних пацієнтів. До догляду за ними залучено досвідчених медсестер, які окреслили основні проблеми в роботі.

**Ключові слова:** ревматологічні захворювання; пацієнти ревматологічного відділення; медсестри.

**Introduction.** Rheumatological diseases are pathological conditions common among the world's population. Considering the main stages of pathogenesis, most of them are inflammatory in nature (for example: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA), Ankylosing spondylitis (AS), Psoriatic arthritis (PsA) and others), but some are degenerative in nature, such as Osteoarthritis (OA). Inflammatory, mainly autoimmune, processes, according to various researchers, affect from 6 % to 10 % of the world's population. There are some differences in different ethnic groups and geographical areas. The number of degenerative joint diseases increases with age in all countries. In general, rheumatological diseases like arthritis are complex and can have numerous causes: autoimmune diseases, injuries, infections, normal wear and tear on joints, and genetics can cause it [1-3].

Patients with rheumatological diseases and conditions that cause joint problems require inpatient and outpatient medical care, physical and psychological rehabilitation. Rheumatic diseases have a clearly detrimental effect on the quality of life, and physical domain is more impaired than mental and social ones [4]. Various specialists are involved in the treatment and care of such patients: family doctors and family nurses, rheumatologists and nurses specialized in working with rheumatology patients, rehabilitation specialists, physiotherapists, psychologists and social workers. Family members of patients also experience some pressure. A large share of the workload falls on nurses in rheumatology departments, who spend a lot of time with patients. Their duties are registering patients in the department, placing them in wards, taking tests for research, monitoring medication intake, physical activity, and nutrition etc. Therefore, many researchers pay much attention to studying the peculiarities of the work of nurses specialized in working with patients with joint diseases [5].

Once conducted a questionnaire survey of nurses in Japan in 2020 on challenges experienced in

rheumatology care, where the participants were nurses certified by the Japan Rheumatism Foundation for the work in rheumatology departments. There were identified five types of challenges: (1) communication, (2) understanding, (3) expertise, (4) system, and (5) collaboration. Furthermore, this investigation revealed the necessity of patient-centred multidisciplinary team care, including health professionals, patients, and other relevant individuals [6].

Several studies have been conducted to identify goals that patients fail to achieve as a result of treatment and care. Among them, it turned out that patients are even concerned about the route of administration of drugs to treat the disease [7]. Patients' values and preferences are among the key factors that determine the strength of recommendations presented in clinical practice guidelines (CPG). That is why there were studies performed to summarize the integration process for patients' perceptions into the development of CPG for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) management in Japan. In conclusion: CPG successfully addressed clinical issues that were important to both medical professionals and patients. Clinicians should understand patients' reluctance to take medications and explain the role of each medication well to increase adherence [8].

Despite the achievements of modern medicine and care algorithms, only about half of patients with joint diseases are satisfied with their treatment, care, and communication with medical staff [9, 10].

As a result of the literature search, it was found that there is not a large number of qualitative and quantitative studies devoted to the specifics of the work of medical personnel, especially nurses, with patients of rheumatological profile.

The aim of the study is to learn about nursing challenges in working with rheumatology patients using statistical study of the patient contingent of the rheumatology department (official information of the Medical Statistics Department of the Ternopil

Regional Clinical Hospital for 2024), analysis of the structure and staffing of the nursing staff of a model rheumatology department (official information of the Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital for 2024), analysis of questionnaires of rheumatology department nurses about the peculiarities of work in the rheumatology department, oral interview with rheumatology department nurses.

**The main part.** The incidence of rheumatic diseases increases worldwide, regardless of economic development, status or climatic zone of the countries. Pain syndrome and lower back pain are the second leading cause of disability even in high-income countries.

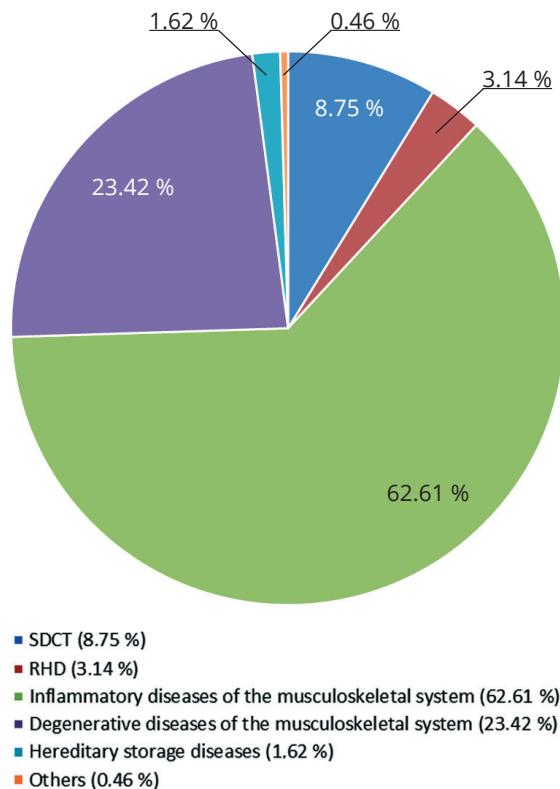
To process and analyze the challenges that rheumatology department nurses face daily, we analyzed the nosological structure of patients in the rheumatology department for 2024.

Over 12 months, 1725 patients were hospitalized and treated in the rheumatology department of the Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital, TOR, who spent a total of 16844 days in the hospital. The average length of stay of one patient in the rheumatology department is 9.76 days. So, almost 10 days of stay and interaction with the department staff: with doctors, nurses, technical workers.

Among all hospitalized (Diagram 1):

- 1,080 patients with inflammatory diseases of the spine and joints (RA, AS, PsA);
- 404 patients with degenerative diseases of the spine and joints and diseases of the musculoskeletal system caused by metabolic disorders (OA, osteochondrosis, gout);
- 151 patients with systemic connective tissue diseases (SDCT), systemic vasculitis and related conditions, in which arthritis and arthralgia are frequent manifestations;
- 54 patients were treated with rheumatic heart disease (RHD) and other cardiovascular diseases;
- 28 cases with hereditary storage diseases;
- 8 with other diseases.

Thus, the department has an absolute predominance of patients with joint diseases of various origins (inflammatory and degenerative) - 86.03 %. However, in patients with systemic connective tissue diseases (SCTD) and hereditary storage diseases, other pathological rheumatic conditions, there are manifestations in the form of arthritis and arthralgia.



*Diagram 1. Nosological forms.*

The rheumatology department of the Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital employs 8 nurses, including 1 senior nurse of the department, 6 ward (duty) nurses and 1 nurse who performs medical manipulations. In close cooperation with the rheumatology department, there is also 1 nurse from the rheumatologist's office of the outpatient department. The total number of nurses involved in the support and care of rheumatology patients is 9. All nurses have sufficient work experience in their specialty (from 14 to 44 years) and long-term experience working with rheumatology patients. 8 out of 9 nurses (88.9 %) spend most of their professional experience working in the rheumatology department. At inpatient facilities, nurses often perform the following duties:

- Registration of the patients in the department
- Develop a connection between patients and their families
- Determine patient care requirements through patient interviews
- Maintain a safe and clean working environment
- Monitor vital signs
- Observe and record patient behavior
- Perform diagnostic tests and physical exams
- Teach patients of selfcare

It is clear that they perform a large amount of work, including teaching of the patients of self-care techniques, instructions, communication with patients and their relatives about the disease and healthy lifestyle, mental health interview.

Given the large flow of patients and daily responsibilities, it can be said that the nurses of the department are under a great burden.

The questionnaire used in this study also included a question about work difficulties, challenges. The rheumatology department nurses identified four main problems:

1. A large flow of the patients.
2. Difficulties with communication.
3. The need for optimization of some organizational processes.
4. Emotional burnout.

In an oral interview after completing the questionnaire, nurses indicated that they see a direct relationship between all these challenges in their work (Diagram 2).

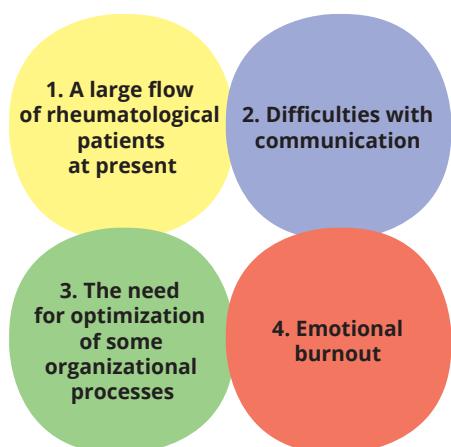


Diagram 2. Nursing challenges in working with rheumatology patients.

In fact, only 1 respondent, representing 11.11 % of all responses, explicitly mentioned burnout. However, in an informal interview after completing the questionnaires, all nurses agreed that the challenges in their work could be a cause of burnout.

Nurses reported that the current influx of rheumatology patients creates a significant workload burden. This high patient flow can strain available resources, reduce the time available for individual patient care, and increase the risk of fatigue-related errors.

Communication challenges were identified as a key issue, potentially encompassing interactions

among healthcare staff, between departments, or with patients. Ineffective communication can lead to misunderstandings, care delays, and decreased team cohesion, all of which may negatively impact clinical outcomes and staff morale.

In conclusion, the issues raised by the nursing staff reflect systemic pressures common in high-demand healthcare environments. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including workload management, communication training, process optimization, and mental health support. Strategic interventions in these areas may enhance staff well-being, improve team efficiency, and contribute to better patient outcomes.

**Conclusions.** 1. Statistical data shows that joint diseases affect a significant portion of the global population, with incidence increasing with age and varying by ethnicity. These conditions not only reduce patients' quality of life but also impose financial and emotional burdens on families and healthcare systems. Effective treatment of rheumatic diseases requires a multidisciplinary, patient-centered approach. However, despite advancements in medical care, only about half of patients report satisfaction with their treatment and interaction with healthcare providers. Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of research focusing on the specific roles and contributions of healthcare professionals - particularly nurses - in rheumatology care.

2. The rheumatology department experiences a consistently high patient load, placing considerable strain on staff. The vast majority of patients (86.03%) suffer from joint diseases, often presenting with chronic conditions such as arthritis or arthralgia. While most patients are discharged with clinical improvement, many remain partially dissatisfied with the overall treatment and care received.

3. The Rheumatology Department at Ternopil Regional Clinical Hospital is staffed by a team of 9 nurses, including 6 department nurses, 1 manipulation nurse, a senior nurse, and additional support from an outpatient rheumatology nurse. All nurses have extensive medical experience, with 88.9% having spent the majority of their careers working specifically in rheumatology care.

4. Staff identify major challenges including high patient volume, communication issues, organizational inefficiencies, and emotional burnout. Implementing regular feedback and participatory management could help improve staff engagement and care quality.

## REFERENCES

1. Arthritis statistics. (n.d.). The Checkup. <https://www.singlecare.com/blog/news/arthritist-statistics/#arthritist-statistics-by-type>.
2. Versus Arthritis. (n. d.). The State of Musculoskeletal Health. <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/the-state-of-musculoskeletal-health>.
3. BMJ Best Practice US. (n.d.). Rheumatoid arthritis - Symptoms, diagnosis and treatment. <https://bestpractice.bmjjournals.com/topics/en-gb/105>.
4. Versus Arthritis. (n. d.). The State of Musculoskeletal Health. <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/the-state-of-musculoskeletal-health/>.
5. Shaikh, A.R., Crix, D., Earl, S. (2022). Using patient experiences to redesign health provision – is this the future of rheumatology services? *Rheumatology*, 61(Suppl.1), keac133.120, DOI 10.1093/rheumatology/keac133.120.
6. Fusama, M., Nakahara, H., Gregg, M., Kuroe, Y., Urata, Y., Kawahata, K., Kawahito, Y., Kojima, M., Sugihara, T., Hashimoto, M., Miyamae, T., Murashima, A., Mori, M., Yajima, N., & Matsui, T. (2023). Challenges faced by nurses engaged in rheumatology care in Japan. *Modern Rheumatology*. DOI 10.1093/mr/road079.
7. Shimizu, M., Inoue, E., Sakai, R., Inoue, Y., Mitsunaga, K., Sugihara, T., Hirano, T., Izawa, K., Kishida, D., Matsushita, M., Mori, M., Narazaki, H., Nishikomori, R., Sumitomo, S., Tanaka, T., Yamazaki, S., Yamaji, K., Yokogawa, N., Yoshifuji, H., & Miyamae, T. (2025). Verification of unmet medical needs in patients with juvenile idiopathic arthritis in Japan. *Modern Rheumatology*. DOI 10.1093/mr/roaf032.
8. Kojima, M., Nakayama, T., Otani, T., Hasegawa, M., Kawahito, Y., Kaneko, Y., Kishimoto, M., Hirata, S., Seto, Y., Endo, H., Ito, H., Kojima, T., Nishida, K., Matsushita, I., Tsutani, K., Igarashi, A., Kamatani, N., Miyasaka, N., & Yamanaka, H. (2017). Integrating patients' perceptions into clinical practice guidelines for the management of rheumatoid arthritis in Japan. *Modern Rheumatology*, 27(6), 924-929. DOI 10.1080/14397595.2016.1276511.
9. Murphy, E., Cadenas, S., Singh, M., Tan, J., Macleod, S., Donalson-Bruce, A., MacKay, N. (2019). Scottish Society for Rheumatology patient experience survey. *Rheumatology*, 58(Suppl. 3), kez106.008. DOI 10.1093/rheumatology/kez106.008.
10. Martin, K.R., O'Neill, C., Bosworth, A. (2017). Who cares? An investigation of the health and perceived social care needs of people with rheumatoid arthritis living in Scotland. *Rheumatology*, 56(Suppl. 2), kex062.162. DOI 10.1093/rheumatology/kex062.162.

Received 05.09.2025