

## Clinical Guideline for the Diagnosis and Management of Early Rheumatoid Arthritis

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<b>Version:</b>	1
<b>Approved by:</b>	Chief Medical Officer
<b>Date:</b>	September 2009
<b>Review Date:</b>	September 2014
<b>Guideline reference number:</b>	
<b>Links to:</b>	Department of Health, Western Australia. Inflammatory Arthritis Model of Care. Perth: Health Networks Branch, Department of Health, Western Australia; 2009.

### Summary section

The Musculoskeletal Health Network has reviewed and endorsed the 'Clinical guideline for the diagnosis and management of early rheumatoid arthritis' by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners ([the Guideline](#)).

This Guideline aligns with the [Inflammatory Arthritis Model of Care](#), endorsed by the State Health Executive Forum in June 2009.

### Aim<sup>1</sup>

The Guideline seeks to provide recommendations to assist primary care professionals to:

- prevent and minimise joint damage.
- minimise functional loss.
- alleviate or minimise pain.
- improve quality of life.

### Scope<sup>1</sup>

The Guideline focuses on the diagnosis and management of adults with rheumatoid (RA) in the early stages. The early stage of the disease is defined as disease duration of less than two years. The Guideline seeks to support primary care professionals in providing optimal, evidence-based care for adult patients (over 16 years of age) presenting with symptoms indicative of RA. It does not address treatment of extra-articular disease or surgical interventions.

The Guideline is mainly intended for use in primary care settings by general practitioners (GPs) and their patients. The Guideline is also relevant to other healthcare professionals working within a multidisciplinary team.

The Guideline is applicable to primary care settings in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

### **Guideline<sup>1</sup>**

'Clinical guideline for the diagnosis and management of early rheumatoid arthritis' by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners ([the Guideline](#)).

Three algorithms summarise the main recommendations of the Guideline and provide an accessible desktop reference. The first two algorithms are detailed flow charts for the diagnosis and the management of RA. The third algorithm is a 'simplified' version that highlights the entire process:

1. Early RA diagnosis
2. Early RA management
3. RA simplified algorithm – early diagnosis and management

### **Methodology**

The process the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners used to develop the Guideline is outlined in the Guideline document. The Guideline is based on an evidence-based literature review to [National Health and Medical Research Council \(NHMRC\) requirements](#). The working group included rheumatologists, GPs, consumer representatives, arthritis organisation representatives and an NHMRC advisor. A critical part of the development process was consultation with the stakeholders.

The Musculoskeletal Health Network sent the Guideline to:

- Musculoskeletal Health Network Inflammatory Arthritis Working Party members.
- Several Western Australian rheumatologists.
- GP Network.
- GPs suggested by the GP Network.

The Guideline was developed for GPs and other primary care health professionals, and as a result the Network's review targeted GPs. Area Health Services, non-government organisations and consumers were involved through the Working Party and Executive Advisory Group reviews.

Participants were asked to provide feedback on guideline strengths, weaknesses, alignment with the latest research, consistency with other guidelines and relevance to the Western Australian context.

The Working Party then met to review the feedback and recommended that the Musculoskeletal Executive Advisory Group (EAG) endorse the Guideline. The EAG endorsed the Guideline in June 2009.

No conflicts of interest were declared by Inflammatory Arthritis Working Party or EAG members.

### **Links**

Arthritis WA: <http://www.arthritiswa.org.au/>

Arthritis Australia: <http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au/>

Australian Rheumatology Association: <http://www.rheumatology.org.au/>

Department of Health, Western Australia. Inflammatory Arthritis Model of Care. Perth: Health Networks Branch, Department of Health, Western Australia; 2009.

[http://www.healthnetworks.health.wa.gov.au/modelsofcare/docs/Inflammatory\\_Arthritis\\_Model\\_of\\_Care.pdf](http://www.healthnetworks.health.wa.gov.au/modelsofcare/docs/Inflammatory_Arthritis_Model_of_Care.pdf)

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Guidelines:  
<http://www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/musculoskeletal diseases>

Notes:

1. This section is a direct quote from: Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Clinical guideline for the diagnosis and management of early rheumatoid arthritis. 2009.