

Question 7

Access to Rheumatology

How can a long-suffering patient get speedier access to Rheumatology? What is NHS Highland's response to a suggestion of paying privately to see an NHS Rheumatologist to speed up access to care?

The rheumatology service is continuously reviewing waiting times and the individual waiting lists for access to the service in NHS Highland. The service embraces and takes part in any appropriate initiatives that become available for them via Scottish Government and the Centre for Sustainable Delivery. Recent initiatives the service has taken part in are the National Elective Coordination Unit (part of the Centre for Sustainable Delivery) waiting list validation which helps us to make sure all those on the waiting list still require an appointment. In addition, the service uses a system called Clinical Dialogue which is a direct real-time messaging system that allows GPs to start a conversation directly with consultants in the rheumatology service. This has shown to have had a positive impact on our waiting lists as advice can be given directly to GPs from the consultants, where clinically appropriate, which can provide quicker treatment for the patient. Consultants' clinic templates are reviewed regularly to address most urgent appointment types and our specialist nurses hold clinics and run a rheumatology flare helpline.

There are national recruitment challenges within rheumatology and the service is currently actively trying to recruit into the medical workforce. We have recently been very fortunate to secure the appointment of a consultant who had relocated to Highland and this has made a positive difference to our waiting times.

Private practice has been explored previously however the current consultant workforce does not have enough capacity to undertake further work in addition to their NHS Highland work commitment.