Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, systemic, inflammatory disorder of unknown etiology. It is characterized by symmetric, polyarticular pain, swelling, morning stiffness, and fatigue. RA has a variable course, often with periods of exacerbations and, less frequently, true remissions. Outcomes are also variable, ranging from the rarely seen remitting disease to severe disease that brings disability and in some patients premature death. Without treatment, the majority of patients will experience progressive joint damage and, in some patients, this results in significant disability within just a few years. Improvement in health related quality of life is one of the most important goals in the management of rheumatoid arthritis and therefore must be pursued as a crucial aim in clinical practice. This paper draws from 49 qualitative interviews conducted with RA patients, before starting a program of Spa Therapy and aims to get an overview of their main RA related difficulties, worries, and overall understanding of quality of life. Information on the patients’ physical function was also obtained by means of the Stanford Health Assessment Questionnaire Disability Index (HAQ). Patients present a mean HAQ score of 1.42 (SD=0.69). Main findings from the interviews highlight the importance given to being autonomous and feeling independent and healthy. In addition, underlying psychological problems (e.g. depressive signs; coping with progressive dependence) and concerns with social relationships (e.g. perceived support, loneliness) emerged as significant facets of living with the disease. Despite different treatments, RA still has many deleterious consequences which from the patients’ perspective include, among other, persistent pain, functional disability, fatigue, and depression. Along with treating RA signs and associated medical evolution, medical staff should consider and deeply understand the patients’ needs, expectations and main perceived determinants of their quality of life.

Keywords: Rheumatoid arthritis, Spa therapy, Quality of Life

BIBLIOGRAPHY


