**Abstract submitted for the 4th Rural Health and Research Congress Armidale 4-6 November 2015**

**Congress stream:** Rheumatology

**Alternate stream:** No.4 Partnership and Integrated Care**.**

**Abstract Title:** Rheumatology Rural Outreach Project

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**Background:** Patients suffering chronic rheumatological conditions in rural NSW were identified as having sub optimal diagnosis and treatment due to a lack of specialist services and education. The project was conceived by Arthritis Australia and the Australian Rheumatology Association to provide outreach clinical support and increase awareness among communities and health service providers in regional NSW.

**Approach:**

The projects two main aims were to:

* set up and monitor rural rheumatology clinics in areas of high need
* provide education and increase awareness of rheumatological conditions among regional communities and health professionals

**Outcomes/Results:**

**Implementing Local Rheumatology Clinical Services**

* Previously 56% patients travelled >200Km compared to 6% post implementation;
* Previously 47% patients travelled >2 hours compared to 4% post implementation;
* Patients waiting >2 months for an appointment decreased from 65% to 20%.

**Educational activities-**

* 90% of community seminar attendees reported improved knowledge;
* 80% of attendees contacted as part of a 3 month follow up reported having made a behavioural change to manage their condition;
* 90% health professionals reported improved knowledge with 84% reporting intention to utilise knowledge in clinical practice.

**Take home messages:**

Implementation of rural rheumatology services and education significantly improved patients access to optimal diagnosis and treatment and delivers an improvement in their knowledge and quality of life.

**50 word summary**

Following identification of sub-optimal diagnosis and treatment of chronic rheumatological conditions Arthritis Australia and the Australian Rheumatology Association provide clinical support and education among selected communities and health service providers in regional NSW. The Project achieved significantly improved access to treatment and improvements in education and awareness.