

Systematic and progressive implementation of the centers of excellence for rheumatoid arthritis: a methodological proposal

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Abstract The implementation of excellence centers in specific diseases has been gaining recognition in the field of health; specifically in rheumatoid arthritis, where the prognosis of the disease is related to an early diagnosis and a timely intervention, it is necessary that the provision of health services is developed in an environment of quality, opportunity, and safety with the highest standards of care. A methodology that allows this implementation in such a way that is achievable by the most of the care centers is a priority to achieve a better attention to populations with this disease. In this paper, we propose a systematic and progressive methodology that will help all the institutions to develop successful models without faltering in the process. The expected impact on public health is defined by a better effective coverage of high-quality treatments, obtaining better health outcomes with safety and accessibility that reduces the budgetary impact for the health systems of our countries.

Keywords Centers of excellence · Comprehensive patient care · Health care quality · Rheumatoid arthritis

Introduction

Rheumatoid arthritis is an illness that has gained relevance due to its increasing burden [1] and the cost for its attention is directly related to its early diagnosis and timely intervention [2], a situation that makes necessary that attention is provided within an environment of proper quality, opportunity, and safety [3]. The methodology of the centers of excellence is a cost-effective alternative for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis [4] and may have a significant impact in public health in Latin America [5] since it goes beyond getting a certification as a center of excellence [6]; it means that the result of the measurement of impact in public health that is wanted is precise, and it is enshrined in the implementation process of a high-quality attention model, based on the effective risk management, with an effective coverage and high-quality treatments, in the accessibility and safety for the patient, obtaining better outcomes in terms of health, reducing the economic impact for the health systems of each country [7] [8]. The decision of implementing a center of excellence may be hindered by the difficulty that is foreseen at first, due to the

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absence of standards to follow, and in that sense, establishing agreements on the parameters to be complied and have a continuous follow-up of the process may imply a reduction of uncertainty, and the motivation for the implementation of an attention methodology that has proven to be effective [9].

The ultimate goal of the centers of excellence seeks to define a model of comprehensive care that meets the needs of our region in order to improve the accessibility, quality, and timeliness of care, and access to appropriate diagnosis and treatment [10].

Implementation methodology

The minimum necessary steps and requirements to achieve the implementation of a center of excellence for rheumatoid arthritis start initially with the identification of the type of center to be implemented in accordance to each one of the types previously defined in REAL-PANLAR, namely [4]:

- Standard
- Optimum
- Model

Next, the implementation process for the accreditation of centers of excellence must be performed through the compliance of minimum standards defined for each center type accredited as center of excellence for RA, a condition that must be kept in time, in such a manner that expected results are obtained. This methodology is oriented to fostering institutional growth, in accordance with the necessities of each center.

From the opening of the process, there will be six months to identify the institution type, apply self-assessment, and define the plans for the improvement to be applied within the six next months, so in that term the verification visit is requested. This application will comprehend the following steps.

Step 1: implementing an attention model for the patients diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, in accordance with the requirements of each type of center of excellence

- Defining a strategic purpose the intention of becoming a Center of Excellence for Rheumatoid Arthritis endorsed by REAL-PANLAR.
- Reviewing the requirements for each type of center of excellence, in accordance with the publication in JCR of May 2015 [4].
- The institutions interested in implementing Centers of Excellence for Rheumatoid Arthritis, in accordance with the general guidelines of the REAL-PANLAR project, must review the Web seminar of quality management in

health for rheumatoid arthritis, available on the website created for that purpose.

- Gathering in retrospective the information that may support the potential candidature to the accreditation process.

Step 2: filling the self-assessment form of each type of center of excellence and implementing improvement actions

- Filling the self-assessment form, starting with the requirements of each type of center as defined previously. The criteria of each type are not exclusive; they correspond to a progressive and systematic process, whereby the purpose is to achieve the highest excellence level in the provision of attention to the patients with RA, regardless of the type of center.
- Gathering and sending the corresponding documentation to support the total of requirements depending of type of center.
- Receiving notification confirming that the center is in the process of certification.
- In the case of not complying with any requirement for classification as one of the types of CE and even having the desire to do so, since it is well known that the total of the requirements must be met, at the moment of requesting assistance.
- Sending the documentation of the improvement plans and of the activities to develop, using the website, in the event of the non-compliance of one or several of the requirements, to the institution that is going to provide virtual assistance.

Step 3: requesting and preparing for a verification visit

- Requesting the pre-visit of the qualified representative of local REAL-PANLAR, once the panel of virtual assistance establishes that center is suitable for verification, with the purpose of confirming the compliance of requirements.
- Upon a second review of the self-assessment form and the implementation of the necessary improvement actions to achieve the compliance of the requirements of each type of center of excellence, the visit of verification must be requested, in accordance to the procedure in force, and defined, for that moment.
- The requesting center will frequently send the results of indicators, in accordance with the type of center to verify and oriented to the final visit, until a next verification visit is scheduled.

Step 4: receiving a verification visit

- Preparing the support documents for each requirement, in accordance with the type of center of excellence.
- Receiving the visit of the verification committee.
- Supporting the compliance of the requirements, in accordance with the requests of the verification panel, so that said panel can verify the registered data in the self-assessment form, and could qualify, pursuant to the process of assistance and verification.

Step 5: official notice of the results of the assistance and verification visit

- After the assistance and verification visit, an official report will be issued reflecting the result of the compliance assessment of the standards for each type of center of excellence and the subsequent possible improvement plans, if it was the case. A grade of favorable or non-favorable will be given, and the timeframes will be established for the implementation of said plans.
- If the grade is non-favorable but the score is within the pre-defined range, there is the option of receiving a second visit within the six following months to complete its process.
- If the grade is not favorable and the score is lower than the minimum required, in accordance with what was established in the consensus, the institution could not apply again to this process in the next two years.

Precisions about qualification in good clinical practices for RA and certification as center of excellence

- The institutions receiving a favorable grade from the assistance and verification panel will receive the REAL-PANLAR accreditation as PANLAR Center of Excellence for RA, in accordance with the requirements demanded for each type of center; the accreditation as each type of center will have a validity of three years, and after said period is elapsed, it shall submit again its candidature.
- Finally, this process will allow institutions and professionals eligible for accreditation as a center of excellence in rheumatoid arthritis.

Expected impact in public health

As we initially discussed, the purpose of developing this strategy goes beyond getting a certification as center of excellence,

since the result of the measurement of the impact in public health that is wanted is precise, and is framed within the implementation process of a high-quality attention model, based on the effective risk management, intervening in the following aspects:

Effective coverage of a high-quality treatment

When a proper use of human resources and infrastructure takes place, it is possible to achieve the control of the illness with a follow-up of the attention model with frequencies in accordance to the status of the illness, achieving the articulation with other disciplines and sectors, guaranteeing the integral character of the model.

Accessibility

In accordance with the standards for each type of center, and pursuant to the high-quality attention model, it will be possible for a correct identification of risk, and therefore, a classification of the patients according to the severity of the illness, guaranteeing the elimination of administrative access barriers and at the level of insurance coverage.

Safety of the patient

It is provided by the standardization of the institutional attention processes, minimizing the risk of suffering from an adverse event in the process of health attention.

Better outcome in terms of health

Due to the standardization of the attention on the basis of the scientific evidence of the model and the successful experiences of the specialists in different cultural and economic contexts of the region, it is possible to expect a faster recovery of health and a reduction of the complications or the fast progression of the illness.

Reduction of the economic impact in the social security system

There is the aim of achieving the cost-efficiency of the attention, by means of the implementation of a standardized model of risk management, obtaining an improvement of the clinical results of large populations of patients concentrated in the centers of excellence, which will favor the reduction of the progress of the severity of this pathology and as a consequence, a reduction of the accelerated use of high-complexity services and high-cost therapies. In addition, it will be possible to transcend the family environment of each patient, improving their quality of life, productivity, and labor development, impacting as well the economy of each country.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosures None.

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