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PROVISION OF CARE SERVICES FOR RHEUMATIC AND MUSCULOSKELETAL DISEASES-RELATED FOOT AND ANKLE PROBLEMS: A SURVEY FROM SIXTEEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

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Background: The increased prevalence of foot and ankle pathologies in Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) is well documented¹, however the provision of foot & ankle (F&A) healthcare services for people with RMDs in Europe has not been evaluated.

Objectives: To assess the current healthcare systems for providing foot & ankle healthcare services for people with RMDs in Europe.

Methods: A survey was undertaken to evaluate current provision of F&A health care services for people with RMDs across Europe. A questionnaire was distributed to all 22 country presidents representing HP associations within EULAR. The questionnaire used was developed and piloted (in 7 countries) by the EULAR F&A Study Group, and structured to capture the provision and type of F&A services for people with RMDs. When the HP presidents felt unable to answer specific questions they were encouraged to consult a colleague who may be better placed to provide the answers.

Results: Sixteen questionnaires were completed (Norway, Ireland, Sweden, Hungary, Netherlands, UK, Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, France, Czech Republic, Spain, Belgium, Malta).

Of the 16, 13 respondents indicated provision of F&A health care services in their country, but only three countries had services specialising in RMD-related F&A problems (Netherlands, UK, Malta).

The professions providing the care for patients with RMD-related F&A problems were different depending on the pathology and the country (Table1). Podiatrists provided care for F&A pain and deformity problems in 11 countries, but provided F&A ulcer care in only 8 countries.

	Foot problems		
	F&A pain	F&A deformity	F&A ulcers
Professions	N ^o Countries (N=16)	N ^o Countries (N=16)	N ^o Countries (N=16)
General Practitioner	14	7	10
Rheumatologist	15	11	10
Rehabilitation Medical Dr	11	10	5
Nurses	9	5	14
Podiatrist	11	11	8
Physiotherapist	14	11	3
Orthotist/prosthetist	14	14	8
Orthopaedic surgeon	12	14	7

Table 1: Number of countries reporting which professions are involved in providing the health services specialising in RMD-related F&A problems. Only professions that were present in ≥ 10 countries were included.

Conclusions: Only 3 countries have F&A health care services specialised to the needs of people with RMDs. The professions providing the care varied between countries, and also depended on the F&A pathology. Interestingly, F&A healthcare services were provided by professions that do not solely specialised in F&A care. Further research is needed to assess the variation of F&A healthcare services between and within European countries and the impact on healthcare of various F&A healthcare service designs.

References: Woodburn, J. & Helliwell, P. Foot problems in rheumatology. *Rheumatology* **36**, 932-934 (1997).

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