Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

- Rheumatoid Arthritis is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system loses the ability to distinguish between foreign materials (antigens) and its own cells and tissues; antibodies (auto-antibodies) are produced and directed against cells and tissues that lead to inflammation, injury and pain.
- RA is a chronic health condition. No cure but many symptoms can be managed.

Symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis:

- Fatigue, occasional fever, general sense of feeling unwell.
- Tender, warm, swollen joints.
- Pain and inflammation in the wrists, fingers, neck, shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, angles, and feet.
- Rheumatoid nodules (bumps under the skin that form close to the joints).
- Anemia (decrease in number of red blood cells).
- Dry eyes and mouth.
- Inflammation of the blood vessels, lining of the lungs, or the sac enclosing the heart.
- Pain and stiffness upon awakening or physical activity.

Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis:

Medical Management Options:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) may reduce pain and inflammation.
- Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARD) may reduce pain, prevent inflammation and slow disease progression.
- Corticosteroids may help control inflammation.
Newer medications have been developed but because they are new and more expensive other treatments are recommended first. Surgery to remove inflamed tissue or to reconstruct or replace affected joints.

Self-Management Options:

- Limit exposure to viral infections and other illnesses.
- Use of splints and other aids to reduce pain and joint stress.
- Modification of activities to reduce discomfort and pain.
- Management of stress, fatigue and pain.
- Occupational and/or physical therapy to learn to manage daily tasks and movement to conserve energy and protect joints.

Things for the Behavioral Health Provider to Consider:

- Chronic pain may result in depression and anxiety.
- Lack of mobility and pain may cause social isolation.
- Importance of stress management to help manage pain and fatigue.

References & Additional Information