

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Motherhood with Rheumatoid Arthritis – Yes or No

Dr Tanya Covic, from the School of Psychology, Associate Professor Louise Sharpe and Professor Nicholas Manolios from the University of Sydney and Associate Professor Julie Pallant from the University of Melbourne are collaborating with Ms Diana Aspinall from the Arthritis Foundation of NSW to develop a decision aid tool to assist women with rheumatoid arthritis to make motherhood decisions. This research is funded by the Arthritis Foundation of NSW and the Australian Research Council through its Linkage Program.

'Planning a family is a significant and complex decision to make, particularly for women with chronic illness such as rheumatoid arthritis', says Dr Covic. 'They are challenged by concerns about the impact of their illness on their unborn child and their ability to manage parenting within the context of their debilitating condition. Rheumatoid arthritis is not similar to other types of arthritis and, therefore, cannot be addressed in the same way. Rheumatoid arthritis is the second most common form of arthritis for people under the age of 44, with women three times more likely than men to be sufferers. Our interdisciplinary research team will develop a decision making tool or aid (DA) that will help women with rheumatoid arthritis make better-informed choices about their health-care. This will benefit both the women and their babies in relation to their psychological, social and medical needs as well as health related education strategies.'

An expert panel consisting of rheumatologists, educators, midwives, obstetricians and researchers will evaluate the decision aid. Women with rheumatoid arthritis will also be recruited for preliminary evaluation of the DA, to further inform its development.



Two hundred women from NSW with rheumatoid arthritis who are contemplating having children or are undecided will then be recruited to take part in a randomised controlled study in order to fully evaluate the DA's effectiveness as an educational decision-making resource.

Providing a sustainable, effective evidence-based decision-making tool to be used in Arthritis NSW offices and by health professionals nationally and internationally, will maximise the well-being of mothers with rheumatoid arthritis and ensure a healthy start to life for their babies.

Project Title: Motherhood choices: a decision aid for women with rheumatoid arthritis.

Funding has been set at: \$131,000

Contact Details: t.covic@uws.edu.au

<http://www.uws.edu.au/psychology>

February 2010