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# Patients with rotator cuff tendinopathy can self-manage, but with certain caveats

Chris Littlewood



NIHR CLAHC for South Yorkshire


**NHS**

*National Institute for  
Health Research*



**IMDTRF**  
International Mechanical Diagnosis  
and Therapy Research Foundation

# Background

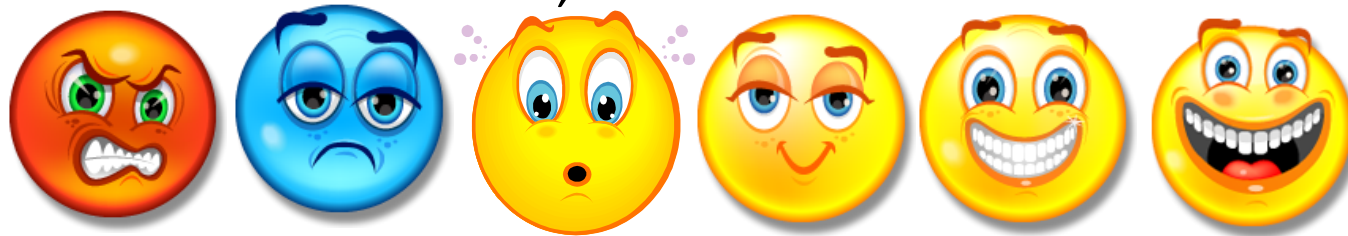
- Evidence has emerged supporting the value of loaded exercises for rotator cuff tendinopathy  
(Littlewood et al (2012). Physiotherapy 98(2). 101-109)
-  The **SELF** study
  - Littlewood et al (2012). BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders 13(62)
  - Single exercise approach
  - Prescribed in relation to most symptomatic direction
    - Within a self-managed framework

# But...

- Exercises are painful to perform
- Require the patient to take responsibility
- Such exercise prescription does not align with the clinical reasoning of many physiotherapists
  - Littlewood et al (2012). *Shoulder & Elbow* 4(1), 64-71.
- So, emerging empirical evidence to support this approach but real and significant barriers that might prevent implementation

# Mixed methods

- Qualitative investigation alongside pilot RCT
  - Barriers
    - Individual interviews
    - Framework analysis
- Private practice setting
  - Six patients (50% male; age range 51-74 years)
  - SPADI +3.1 to -42.3; mean -19.7



- Two physiotherapists

# Expectations and preferences

- In this context, most of the patients expected physiotherapy to be therapist-led and ‘hands-on’;
  - *‘I expected a bit of a pummel actually and a bit of a tug about and somebody to go and make it all feel better.’* (ID 18)
- One of the physiotherapists also reflected:
  - *‘I am very, very hands-on normally.’* (T2)
- Complex interplay; expectations ≠ positive outcome

# Role of the physiotherapist

- ***'... well I think (physiotherapist) felt more or less straight away that it was unfortunate that I'd drawn the short straw...'*** (ID 37)
- ***'I think there are some clients...you just think it's totally inappropriate and a waste of time.'*** (T1)
- ***'... she explained it very well...I could ring her if I had problems, and she was very responsive.'*** (ID 18)

# Perception of the intervention

- ***...it's such a simple exercise...I just came out thinking waste of time...it did seem such a minor thing that, how on earth could this possibly give me any benefit?*** (ID 29)
- ***.....it became a bit laborious...*** (ID 37)
- ***'...with it being such an easy exercise it...became part of a routine ...I would do, it was short, short and sweet. So it wasn't a case of having to find time to do it, it just naturally fell into a little sort of routine that I have.'*** (ID 29)
- Reflecting upon a previous experience of physiotherapy:
- ***'I didn't do them...I don't know - because I thought they were doing it for me. I thought oh well, I'm going back next week.'*** (ID 18)

# Response to therapy

- ***'...when you find that they're not making a great deal of improvement, you're less inclined to erm continue it.'*** (ID 37)
- ***'...when I started seeing the results...that motivated me on more and more to keep going.'*** (ID 18)
- ***'...it just carried on improving erm and it made me realise how weak the arm was ...I was quite pleased that it came on so quickly.'*** (ID 29)



# Personal attributes

- ***'...I suppose if you remembered..... it's more of a problem doing it on your own than if you say go to a physio...'*** (ID 37)
- ***'...while I was waiting for the kettle to boil, I would do it...'*** (ID 29)
- ***'...I kept my diary and I always wrote why I'd not done it so that I could think to myself well how can I fit that in then?'*** (ID 18)
- ***'I'm used to exercise and I know that repeated exercise improves strength and mobility.'*** (ID 15)

# Other bits and bobs...

- *Pain as a barrier to engagement*
- *'...they weren't sold by that idea. They didn't like the idea of that.'* (T1)
- *'...if it's not hurting it's not helping...'* (ID 13)
- In the context of a persistent or recurrent disorder
- *'...it's been really positive...I can self-manage that now.'* (ID18)

# The caveats

- Expectations of physiotherapy  $\neq$  philosophy of self-management
  - Not necessarily a barrier, providing:
- Intervention is offered within a positive and supporting environment
  - Role of beliefs of the physiotherapist
- Patients understand the reasons for undertaking the exercise
- Patients effectively self-monitor and engage with proactive follow-up
- Early and appreciable response to therapy appears important;
  - Need to foster realistic expectations regarding response time

# Further detail...



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Chris Littlewood<sup>a,\*</sup>, Peter Malliaras<sup>b</sup>, Sue Mawson<sup>c</sup>, Stephen May<sup>d</sup>, Stephen Walters<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Health & Related Research, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, 30 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 4DA, UK  
<sup>b</sup> Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Hospital, London, UK  
<sup>c</sup> Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, 11 Broomfield Road, Sheffield S10 2SE, UK  
<sup>d</sup> Faculty of Health & Wellbeing, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield S10 2BP, UK

- @PhysioChris 



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Self-managed loaded exercise versus usual physiotherapy treatment for rotator cuff tendinopathy: a pilot randomised controlled trial

Chris Littlewood<sup>a,\*</sup>, Peter Malliaras<sup>b</sup>, Sue Mawson<sup>c</sup>, Stephen May<sup>d</sup>, Stephen J. Walters<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Health & Related Research, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, 30 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 4DA, UK  
<sup>b</sup> Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Hospital, London, UK  
<sup>c</sup> Director of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research & Care (CLAHRC) for South Yorkshire, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, 11 Broomfield Road, Sheffield S10 2SE, UK  
<sup>d</sup> Faculty of Health & Wellbeing, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield S10 2BP, UK