

A CReI-ISS survey to investigate rheumatologists' knowledge, attitudes, and clinical practice: findings from the IntegraRE project

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Introduction

Food supplements have gained attention in rheumatology as they are perceived as a natural, safe, and effective way to support well-being, leading patients to seek guidance from their physicians [1]. In this context, the IntegraRE project aims to gather information on the use and knowledge of food supplements in rheumatology, by both physicians and patients. This work reports preliminary findings from the first month of the project.

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Objectives

The present study assessed rheumatologists' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding dietary supplements, with a primary focus on prescriptions to patients.

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Methods

A cross-sectional survey was performed among 1,134 rheumatologists affiliated with the Italian Rheumatologists College (CReI). The 69-item questionnaire covered socio-demographics, knowledge (score range 0-20), attitudes (score range 0-100), and clinical practice (score range 0-100). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify factors linked to supplement prescriptions.

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Results

During the first month, 63 questionnaires were collected. Most respondents were women (57.1%), over 50 (55.6%), hospital-based (58.1%), and working in Central Italy (50.0%). About 74% had over 10 years of experience and 39% saw more than 1,500 patients annually. Rheumatologists showed a median attitude score of 63.2/100, with 42.9% displaying a positive approach. Knowledge was variable with a score ranging from 2 to 15, so indicating potential gaps. Regarding prescriptions, a moderate approach to food supplement-related practices was observed (mean score 48.6/100). The multivariable analysis revealed that being female, no physical activity, not using supplements, higher knowledge, evidence-based sources, and local practice settings reduced prescriptions based on misconceptions.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of rheumatologists

		n	%
Sex	Female	36	57.1
	Male	27	42.9
Age	<50 yrs	28	44.4
	≥50 yrs	35	55.6
Smoking habit	Smoker	8	12.9
	Former smoker	6	9.7
	Non-smoker	48	77.4
Physical activity	No	21	33.3
	Yes	42	66.7
	< 2.5 h	15	23.8
	> 2.5 h	27	42.9
Food-Related Conditions	No	54	85.7
	Yes	9	14.3
Specific dietary pattern	No	63	100
	Yes	0	0
Food supplement use	No	38	60.3
	Yes	25	39.7
Italian macroarea	North	10	16.7
	Centre	30	50.0
	South and Islands	20	33.3
Primary workplace setting	Private	9	14.5
	Local facility	11	17.7
	Hospital	36	58.1
	University	6	9.7
Professional experience	<10 yrs	16	25.8
	≥10 yrs	46	74.2
Patients per year	≤1000	23	37.1
	1001-1500	15	24.2
	≥1501	24	38.7

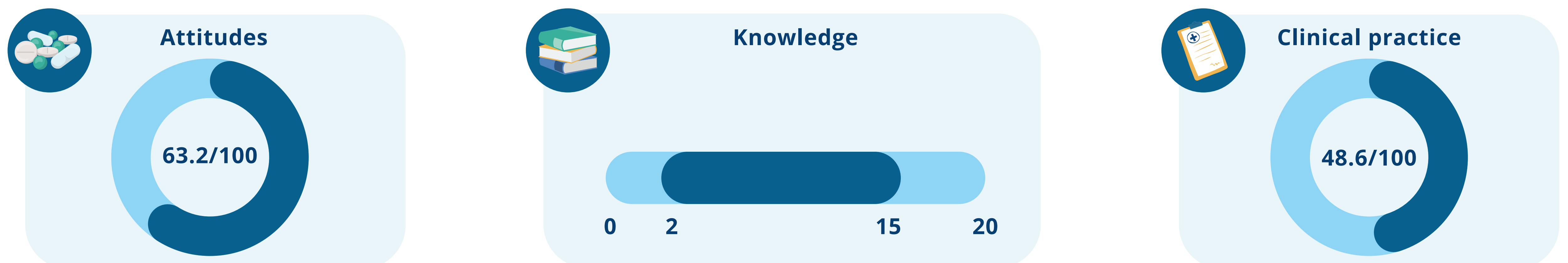


Figure 1. Scores for knowledge, attitudes, and clinical practice among surveyed rheumatologists.

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Conclusions

These findings underscore the need for ongoing education and training of healthcare professionals, with a focus on the importance of evidence-based practices and the critical evaluation of food supplements use. Addressing these gaps could help ensure that prescriptions are made in patients' best interests, balancing potential benefits with safety considerations.

References:
[1] Daien C, Czernichow S, Letarouilly JG, Nguyen Y, Sanchez P, Sigaux J, Beauvais C, Desouches S, Le Puillandre R, Rigalleau V, Rivière P, Romon M, Semerano L, Seror R, Sfedj S, Tournadre A, Vacher D, Wendling D, Flipo RM, Sellam J. Dietary recommendations of the French Society for Rheumatology for patients with chronic inflammatory rheumatic diseases. *Joint Bone Spine* 2022; 89(2):105319