



Trainee & Program Details

Training Program

Rheumatology (Adult) 2025

Training Program Phase *

Specialty foundation

Date of Observation *

30/04/25

Learning Capture Details

Type of Learning *

Personal reflections

Title*

Supporting patients through diagnostic uncertainty

Select the primary learning goal *

9. Communication with patients

Learning Capture Details

Description of Activity *

In a recent rheumatology clinic, I reviewed a 47-year-old patient presenting with joint pain, fatigue, and elevated inflammatory markers, but without a clear pattern consistent with a specific rheumatologic diagnosis. The team was considering an evolving inflammatory arthritis versus an undifferentiated connective tissue disease, but further investigations were required before confirming a diagnosis. The patient expressed frustration and anxiety, seeking a definitive explanation and treatment plan. I helped summarise the team's impressions during the discussion and observed how my supervisor explained diagnostic uncertainty with empathy and clarity, validating the patient's concerns while outlining the plan for monitoring and follow-up.

What did you learn? *

I learned that uncertainty is an inherent part of rheumatology practice, particularly in early or evolving presentations, and that communicating this uncertainty effectively is a core skill. Patients may interpret "we're not sure yet" as a lack of knowledge or care unless the message is framed compassionately. I also saw how providing a term for the situation, such as "undifferentiated inflammatory arthritis" can help patients feel acknowledged and less adrift. Transparent communication, paired with a clear plan for review and ongoing monitoring, reassures patients and supports trust, even when a diagnosis remains pending.

How will you apply this learning in the future? *

In future cases where diagnostic uncertainty exists, I will focus on explaining the reasoning behind uncertainty and using language that is clear, supportive, and free of medical jargon. I'll ensure I validate the patient's emotions, reinforce that uncertainty does not equate to inaction, and outline specific next steps for follow-up, investigation, and symptom management. Moving forward, I'll remember that effective communication in these moments is not only about delivering answers, it's about helping patients feel accompanied and understood while clarity evolves.

Assessor Feedback (optional)

Feedback From *

Dr Miriam Thorne

Assessor Role *

Supervisor

Personal Message

Dear Dr Thorne, I'd value your feedback on this reflection involving a patient who was uncertain and distressed about not having a clear diagnosis. I'm working on improving how I communicate with patients in complex or evolving clinical scenarios.

Feedback Requested Date

30/04/2025

Feedback *

Jemima provides a thoughtful reflection demonstrating strong insight into communicating uncertainty in rheumatology. She recognises how tone, transparency, and empathy influence how patients perceive "not knowing" and show developing skill in balancing honesty with reassurance. Practical strategies such as validating emotions, using clear language, and outlining follow-up plan reflect a patient-centred approach. This reflection links learning to clinical practice and shows reflective capacity appropriate for the specialty foundation phase.