

MSK SKILLS Training | Effective consultations: examination, diagnosis, and management of musculoskeletal presentations

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Introduction

One in seven GP consultations¹ are related to MSK conditions. It is vital that health and care professionals of all disciplines are equipped with the skills and confidence to ensure patients receive high quality-care.

At Arthritis UK our Professional Engagement & Education team's mission is to enable health and care professionals at every stage of their careers to advance their Skills, Knowledge, Information, and Lifelong Learning (SKILLS) in musculoskeletal (MSK) health.

Aim

Research carried out in 2015² around the unmet needs of people with arthritis highlighted that more training was needed for GPs about arthritis and joint pain. This was supported by findings from research with healthcare professionals in 2016³ where GPs said they felt there were unrealistic expectations of what could be delivered within the 10-minute consultation. This research demonstrated the need to better equip GPs with the knowledge and confidence to better support people with arthritis.

This led to the development of the 'Effective consultations' training with the aims of increasing knowledge and improving confidence in MSK care, focusing on ways in which to simplify and declutter the 10-minute consultation.

The course was originally written by GPs for a GP audience, but we have now found that is useful for anyone in a primary care diagnostic role.

The training was initially delivered as a national model with a small number of workshops each year. This has moved to a local model and is now delivered across the UK by local trainers face to face or online. The training has also received endorsement from the BSR and was previously accredited by the RCGP until the scheme closed in 2025.

Acknowledgements

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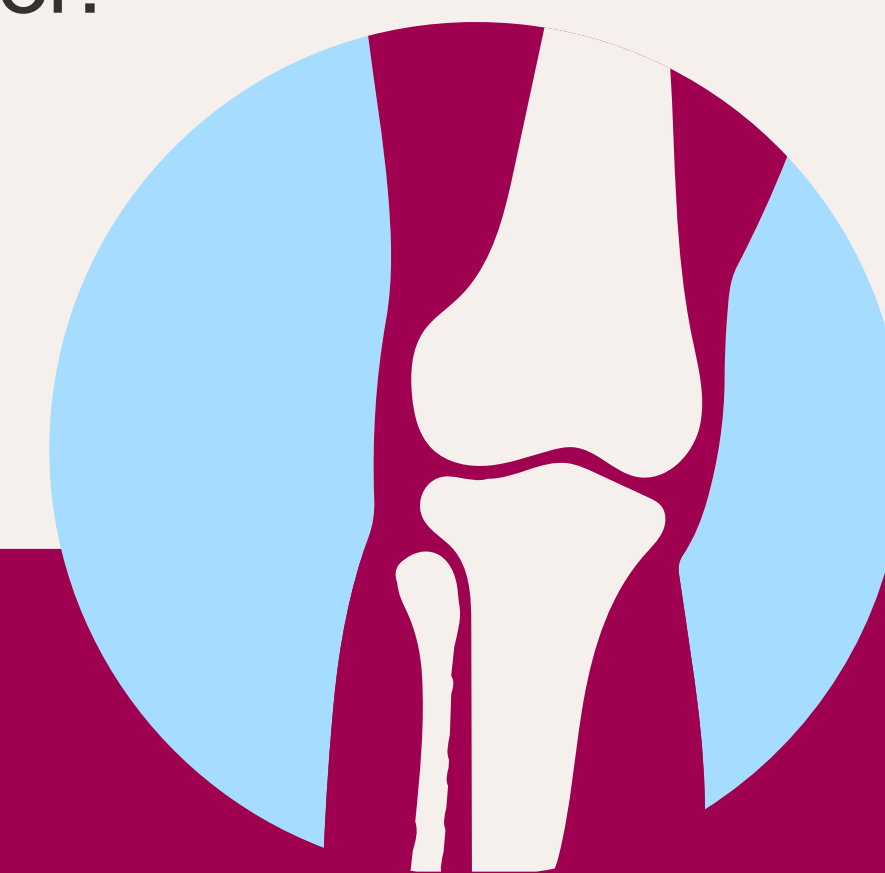
References

1. The State of Musculoskeletal Health, 2025, Arthritis UK
2. Identifying the unmet needs of people with arthritis, Huddard T Harris C and Rowe R, 2015, ESRO
3. Healthcare Professional Insight Work, Beninger K, Busby A, Flude C and MacGregor J, 2016, Kantar Public

Methods

The MSK SKILLS effective consultations training focuses on developing the practical skills required in a typical 10-minute primary care MSK consultation. It combines expert lectures with practical, small-group workshops to boost confidence in a hands-on environment. Delegates are given the time to practice history taking, examination, and communication for:

- Low back pain and sciatica
- Lower limb
- Upper limb



Outcomes / Results

Delegates reported:

- 96%** of attendees would recommend our training
- 98%** of attendees said the learning aims were met
- 42%** Increase in knowledge
- 31%** Increase in examination skills
- 31%** Increase in confidence in diagnosis
- 31%** Increase in confidence in treating

*All data relates to face-to-face courses delivered during 2025/26 based on 211 responses.

"I honestly think this is one of the best courses I have ever attended! ... it has honestly changed my life."

Conclusion

Our evaluations highlight key themes of better communication, empowerment, managing expectations, providing holistic support, reducing unnecessary referrals and imaging requests.

Our training delivery provides HCPs with the confidence and knowledge they need to support the delivery of change. We encourage collaboration with peers and patients to enable transformation for each individual patient journey.

When asked how the training will benefit their patients...

"In every way. They will benefit from a more confident doctor who will perform focused examinations, communicate effectively, and positively, share resources that will empower them early on, leading to improved outcomes."