“Active Farming” study: Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in Victorian farmers

Henrike Milne
Mark Newell
Cate Mercer-Grant
Ananda Chandrasekara
Susan Brumby
Farmers and arthritis

Farmers at increased risk of arthritis:

- Physically demanding occupation
- Risk of traumatic injuries, repetitive strain
- Reduced access to health services - distance, time
Farmers and arthritis

• Average age of farmers 52¹

• many work > 80 yrs

• Osteoarthritis main disability cause in elderly ²

¹ 12 years older than average for other professions
Source: Farm Facts 2012, National Farmers Federation

Farmers and arthritis

- Tend to “soldier on”, keep working with pain
- Increased out of pocket costs – medications, visits to health professionals, time off farm
- In our NCFH – Sustainable Farm Families ™ study
  - two thirds had joint or muscle pain
  - one fifth had back pain
  - 10% arthritis
Study aims and rationale

To explore the impact of arthritis on farming men and women

Especially out of pocket costs
“Active farming” study

Arthritis Victoria Grant

Aim: 100 farm men and women

- Arthritis and pain symptoms
- Medications (prescription, over the counter)
- Access to health services: distance, cost, frequency
- Out of pocket costs

Study approved by Multidisciplinary Ethics Committee of South West Health Care (#1/2012)
Methods 1

Identifying potential participants

1. 950 SFF participants – initial letter
2. Identify SFF participants with
   • Arthritis or musculoskeletal conditions
   • Body pain
   • Analgesic or anti-inflammatory medications
3. Letter and plain language statement / consent sent
4. First phone contact to schedule time for interview
Phone interview

- Baseline demographics, years farming
- Type of farm, off farm work including hours
- Pension, HCC, veterans, private health insurance
- Smoking and alcohol intake
- Arthritis medical history: parts of body affected, injuries, surgery, family history of arthritis
Phone interview (cont’d)

List of all health professionals / services used

- GP(s), specialist(s)
- Physio, gym, exercise class, hydrotherapy, massage
- Blood tests and medical imaging
- Alternative therapists

For each, distance in km, costs, bulk billing recorded

All medications: prescription, over the counter, vitamins – including dosing and costs
Phone interview (cont’d)

Validated Quality of Life Questionnaires:

1. **Arthritis Impact Measurement Scales 2**
   - 26 questions

2. **AQoL** (assessment of quality of life)
   - 12 questions

- Diary posted to record all expenses connected with arthritis for **2 months** then returned to us
- Letter for GP advising of study participation
- Optional consumer needs assessment survey by Arthritis Vic.
Results: recruitment

• Letters to 950 SFF participants for data access
• 4.5% not wanting data access/participation
• Identified potential participants in two rounds:
  1. Round One n=156
     • Very mild body pain or more
  2. Round Two n=92
     • Moderate body pain or more
     • Musculoskeletal or arthritis in medical notes
     • Arthritis / pain medications

Total number of potentially eligible participants: 248
Results: recruitment (cont’d)

Of the 248 potential participants:

- Interviews completed (n=71) 28.7%
- Interviews scheduled (n = 2) 0.8%
- Uncontactable 14.9%
- Declined/not eligible 29.8%
- Still to contact 25.8%

+ 3 recruited by other means = total 74 enrolled

Of these, 14 completed and returned diaries
Results: baseline data (n=74 to date)

Age: Mean 56.3, median 57, range 29-78 yrs.
Gender: Male 51.4, female 48.6
Birthplace: all but 2 in AUS (NL-1, UK-1), ATSI: none
Years on farm: Mean 38 (range 6-74)

Off farm work: 22/74 participants (29.7%)

Median no. of hours worked off farm: 19.5 (range 2-60)
3/74 had 2 off-farm jobs
Results: Baseline data 2 (n=74)

Pension/benefit (%)

- Aged pension: 6.9%
- Disability: 3.4%
- Other pension: 3.4%
- No pension: 86.2%

Private health insurance (%)

- None: 29.3%
- Hosp only: 13.8%
- Hosp + Extras: 56.9%

Health Care card 25%
Baseline data 3: selected AIMS QOL (n = 73)

- Trouble doing vigorous activities: 34.3% All/most days, 39.7% Some/few days, 26% No days
- Walking or climbing stairs: 17.8% All/most days, 16.4% Some/few days, 26% No days
- Severe pain due to arthritis: 23.3% All/most days, 24.7% Some/few days, 26% No days
- Difficult sleep due to pain: 13.7% All/most days, 39.7% Some/few days, 46.5% No days
- Unable to do paid work: 2.8% All/most days, 7.2% Some/few days, 89.9% No days
- Need to work a shorter day: 7.4% All/most days, 27.9% Some/few days, 64.7% No days
Baseline data 4: selected AQoL
(n = 73)

q. 10 “thinking about how you sleep”
Without difficulty most of the time 31.5%
Interrupted some of the time 34.2%
Interrupted most nights 31.5%
Sleep in short bursts only 2.7%

q. 12 “How much pain or discomfort do you experience”
None 15.1%
Moderate 76.7%
Severe 6.8%
Unbearable 1.4%
Alcohol intake: general comments

In general, not a high risk drinking group:

• Almost ¼ (24.3%) were non-drinkers
• 50% only 1-2 drinks on one occasion
• Only 5.5% drank “high risk” > once a week
Returned diaries: initial results (n = 14)

11 of 14 had expenditure items entered
Mean $224, median $125 (range $3-1201) over 2 months
Mean itemised out of pocket costs after rebate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean cost ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied health</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>87.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Imaging</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>125.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>240.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>144.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTC medications</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamins etc</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some initial conclusions

- Arthritis and body pain significant in farmers
- Most continue to work full time despite this
- Although only early results, considerable out of pocket expenses incurred, especially prescriptions and complementary medicines and allied health therapists
What is next?

• Finish recruitment
• Collect diaries
• Conduct at least two focus groups
Questions?