

## Letter to the Editor: “Chronic Pain Education in Portugal: Perspectives from Medical Students and Interns”

### Carta ao Editor: “O Ensino da Dor Crónica em Portugal: As Perspectivas dos Estudantes de Medicina e dos Internos do Ano Comum”

**Keywords:** Analgesics, Opioid; Chronic Pain; Education, Medical; Internship and Residency

**Palavras-chave:** Analgésicos Opióides; Dor Crónica; Ensino Médico; Internato e Residência

Dear Editor

The article “Chronic Pain Education in Portugal: Perspectives from Medical Students and Interns”<sup>1</sup> has caught my attention, since I am a final year Family Medicine resident and a second year Palliative Care Master’s degree student and have developed a strong interest in chronic pain management.

The authors concluded newly formed doctors have knowledge gaps regarding pain control management and that changes in undergraduate *curricula* are required for future clinicians to develop skills in this field. In line with the findings of this study, as a medical student, and later as a

resident physician, I have dealt with the lack of expertise in symptom relief myself, equally experiencing difficulties and uncertainty in opioid prescription, a factor which compelled me to look for specific postgraduate training.

Clinical evidence supports the use of opioid analgesics to treat cancer<sup>2</sup> and moderate to severe non-cancer pain.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Montréal Declaration<sup>4</sup> and the Portuguese Directorate-General of Health (Direção Geral de Saúde)<sup>5</sup> established the control of pain as a human right and a priority in health care provision, respectively.

As reiterated by this study, barriers limiting treatment may involve aspects related with the patient and healthcare systems, but also with healthcare professionals.<sup>6</sup> Despite Portuguese laws being friendly to opioid prescription, the medical consumption of these drugs remains one of the lowest in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

I believe this study has made an important contribution to understanding a significant reason that may limit the achievement of pain control in our patients. Notwithstanding, it also reaffirms the importance of new and wider studies to further explain the reasons of low usage of opioids in the control of pain and other symptoms by Portuguese physicians and ultimately, to help overcoming this problem in our country.

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