

Management of Chronic Pain: The Importance of Improving Patient Quality of Life

Abordar a Dor Crónica: A Importância de Melhorar a Qualidade de Vida dos Utentes

Keywords: Chronic Pain; Quality of Life
Palavras-chave: Dor Crónica; Qualidade de Vida

Dear Editor,

We recently read a study performed in Portugal between September 2017 and November 2018 concerning chronic pain in Primary Health Care centers. The prevalence of chronic pain was estimated to be 33.6%, with severe impact on patient quality of life. This was mainly due to musculoskeletal causes affecting the lumbar spine and lower limbs.¹

Pain has been considered the fifth vital sign since Dr. James Campbell addressed the American Pain Society in 1995. Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with current or potential tissue damage or described in terms of such damage. Chronic pain is pain that persists or recurs for longer than three months.² It can significantly decrease patient quality of life with physical, psychological, social, family and work consequences.

Being one of the most common causes for patients to seek healthcare services, it is considered a public health concern. In 2010, costs associated with chronic pain amounted to €4611.69 million per year, with 42.7% direct and 57.3% indirect costs, representing 2.71% of the Portuguese gross domestic product.³ Chronic pain often leads to early retirement due to disability, high levels of absenteeism and unemployment.

Due to its consequences, pain should be recognized as a disease itself. It triggers a continuous stress response in a vulnerable body that causes suffering, physical, functional, and psychological disability, fatigue, decreased appetite, concentration difficulties, and sleep disorders, which may then lead to social isolation, hopelessness, and thoughts of death.¹

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Patients report a significant impact on quality of life ranging from difficulties in mobility and daily life activities to personal hygiene, leading to discomfort.

Chronic pain is frequently associated with other chronic comorbidities such as endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases, circulatory and musculoskeletal system problems.

Pain must be identified early on and properly treated, and its management should be multidisciplinary, with chemical, physical and psychological approaches. The best strategy to prevent pain chronification requires administering adequate treatment as soon as possible.

We consider that medical education and patient literacy concerning pain prevention and its management is imperative. There should be an increasing effort regarding the implementation of pain clinics and specific chronic pain programs, both at the level of primary and secondary health care.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CMN, NSM: Data collection and analysis. Drafting, critical review and approval of the manuscript.

CFA: Critical review and approval of the manuscript.

PROTECTION OF HUMANS AND ANIMALS

The authors declare that the procedures were followed according to the regulations established by the Clinical Research and Ethics Committee and to the Helsinki Declaration of the World Medical Association updated in 2013.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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