

A Survey of Chronic Pain Patients' Experiences in the Emergency Department

Authors : G. Fitzpatrick, S. O. Chonghaile, D. Harmon

Abstract : Objective: Chronic pain patients represent a unique challenge in the Emergency Department. Very little literature has been published regarding this group of patients. Our aim was to determine the attitude of patients with chronic pain to the Emergency Department in order to improve and streamline their future visits. Methods: A two-year survey was carried out on Chronic Pain Patients regarding their Emergency Department Attendances. Patients attending the Pain Clinic in Croom Hospital, Co. Limerick were asked to complete a 20-part questionnaire regarding their experiences of visiting the Emergency Department in the preceding year. 46 questionnaires were completed. Results: Unbearable breakthrough pain was the main reason for visiting the Emergency Department. More than half (54%) of those surveyed were not satisfied with the treatment received. Problems indicated included under-treatment of pain (59%), a sense of being under undue suspicion of drug-seeking behaviour (33%) and a perception that the patient themselves understood their condition better than the treating doctor (76%). Paracetamol, NSAIDs, or time off work comprised 72% of the treatments offered – all of which could have been provided by their General Practitioner. Only 4% were offered a nerve block. 67% felt that the creation of personalised Patient Plans, consisting of an agreed plan between the patient, their pain specialist, and the Emergency Department, would expedite their trip through the Emergency Department. Conclusions: Chronic pain patients generally have a negative experience in the ED. Possible future solutions include increasing our empathy and levels of knowledge, provision of nerve blocks in the ED, and use of personalised "Patient Plans" to streamline the treatment pathway for this group of patients.

Keywords : chronic pain, survey, patients, emergency department

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