

SAND abstract No. 42 from the BEACH program 2002–03

Subject: Prevalence and management of chronic pain

Organisation supporting this study: Janssen-Cilag Pty Ltd.

Issues: The prevalence of chronic pain among general practice patients; the conditions causing chronic pain; the anatomical sites most affected; the managements being utilised by GPs; duration of medication usage; management of medication side effects.

Sample: 2,800 respondents from 99 GPs; data collection period: 11/6/2002–15/7/2002.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method: 2002-03' on the FMRC website (http://www.fmrc.org.au/publications/SAND_abstracts.htm).

Summary of results

The age-sex distribution of respondents was similar to the distribution of the total BEACH sample with the majority (57.0%) being female and 54.0% aged 45 years or over.

A total of 507 patients (18.1%, 95% CI: 15.4–20.8) were reported as having chronic pain. Prevalence was significantly higher for patients aged 45 years or more (25.8%, 95% CI: 20.5–31.1) than for patients aged less than 45 years (8.8%, 95% CI: 6.7–10.9). There was no significant difference between the prevalence for males (16.3%) and females (19.5%).

Causal conditions were identified for 490 of the 507 chronic pain sufferers. In total, 82 different causal conditions were reported, 41.8% of these (n=205) being forms of arthritis including osteoarthritis (30.8%), arthritis not otherwise specified (NOS) (5.9%), and rheumatoid arthritis (5.1%).

Anatomical sites were recorded for 472 patients. A total of 618 responses (multiple sites were affected for some patients) were recorded for 14 different body sites, those most commonly affected being the back (32.5%), knee (12.9%) and the neck/cervical spine (7.9%).

Medication usage was recorded for 495 patients. More than two thirds (70.3%) took analgesics, either alone or with another medication. One third (33.1%) took NSAIDs, 8.1% took psychotropics and 7.1% took oral sustained release morphine (OSRM).

For each medication type, the back was the main body site affected (other analgesics–44.2%; NSAIDs–45.8%; psychotropics–30.0%; OSRM–60.0%). Types of arthritis were the main cause of chronic pain for patients in 3 of the medication groups (other analgesics–41.6%; NSAIDs–60.1%; psychotropics–17.5%). The main cause of chronic pain for patients taking OSRM was back problems (28.6%) followed by malignant neoplasm (20.0%) and musculoskeletal conditions (17.1%).

Medication groups were similar across time periods of usage. Forty eight patients took medication to manage side effects. Of 57 medications listed, 66.7% (n=38) were laxatives and 8.7% (n=5) were omeprazole.

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