

PREVALENCE AND RELEVANCE OF PAIN IN OLDER PERSONS.

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Article first published online: 12 APR 2012

DOI: 10.1111/j.1526-4637.2012.01349.x

Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Pain Medicine

Special Issue: Neurobiology and Clinical Implications of Pain and Aging

Volume 13, Issue Supplement s2, pages S23-S26, April 2012

Keywords:

Elderly, persistent pain, prevalence, disability, depression, undertreatment, cognitive impairment

Abstract

SETTING:

With the ageing of the world's population, any health problem which adversely affects quality of life in older persons becomes increasingly salient. Persistent pain is one of the most prevalent health conditions faced by adults of advanced age, and is recognized as a major concern for this segment of the population.

RESULTS:

Numerous epidemiologic surveys suggest that pain is most common during the late middle-aged phase of life (55-65 years) and continues at approximately the same prevalence into older age (65+). This is true regardless of the anatomical site or the pathogenic cause of pain. The one exception appears to be pain associated with degenerative joint disease (e.g., osteoarthritis) which shows an exponential increase until at least 90 years of age. Common age-associated conditions like dementia may result in a reduced frequency and intensity of pain. Daily pain is a major risk factor for developing disability and the oldest age cohorts are most vulnerable. Discretionary and higher order physical activities appear most affected, while basic activities of daily living may be modified but are rarely ceased altogether. Similar relationships have been documented for risk of depression and mood disturbance in older persons with persistent pain. Despite such well characterized adverse impacts, pain often remains poorly treated in older persons. This occurs across all health care settings examined (i.e., emergency, acute, outpatient, long-term care).

CONCLUSION:

Improved knowledge for both health professionals and patients, addressing the current research gaps and expansion of age-appropriate pain management services will be required to better meet the needs of our rapidly ageing population.