THEME

Musculoskeletal medicine



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Chronic musculoskeletal problems managed in general practice

The BEACH program, a continuous national study of general practice activity in Australia, gives us an overview of encounters at which chronic musculoskeletal problems were managed. This synopsis provides a backdrop against which articles in this issue of the Australian Family Physician can be further considered.

To identify chronic musculoskeletal (CM) problems

we used a chronic conditions list¹ classified according to ICPC-2.2 Conditions included: congenital anomalies, musculoskeletal syndromes, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, malignant neoplasms, and other less common conditions such as lupus erythematosus and scleroderma. Among the 101 993 encounters recorded in BEACH between April 2005 and March 2006, there were 7389 at which 7597 CM problems were managed. Encounters at which CM problems were managed made up 7.3% of all encounters. These problems accounted for 5.0% of all problems managed and 43.3% of all musculoskeletal problems managed.

Gender and age of patients

Almost two-thirds (64.5%) of the 7389 patients at CM encounters were female, a higher proportion than total BEACH encounters (56%); CM problems were managed at 8% of encounters with females; 6% with males.

The age distribution of patients at CM encounters reflected the chronicity of these problems, with 46.5% of patients aged 65 years and over (BEACH total 26.8%). Age specific rates ranged <1 per 100 encounters with patients aged <25 years to 13.0 with those aged 75 years and over.

Reasons for encounter

The effect of the age distribution of the sample is shown in the high rate of patient reasons for encounter (176 compared with 150 per 100 total BEACH encounters). The need for prescriptions, test results, check ups, and symptoms of the back, neck, shoulder and knee made up a large proportion of reasons for encounter.

Other problems managed

Circulatory problems were the most commonly managed comorbidity at a rate of 21 per 100 of these encounters. These were followed by endocrine/metabolic problems managed at 13 per 100 of these encounters. Individually, hypertension was the most common other problem, managed at a rate of 14 per 100 CM encounters.

Medications

Medications were prescribed, advised over-the-counter or supplied by the general practitioner at a higher rate (84 per 100 CM problems managed) than the BEACH average (71 per 100 problems). Medications were prescribed at a rate of 72 per 100 (compared with 59 per 100 problems in BEACH) and nonsteroid anti-inflammatory drugs accounted for almost one-third. Paracetamol was the most common individual prescribed medication, at a rate of 12 per 100 CM problems. Meloxicam was prescribed at a rate of 7, and paracetamol/ codeine at a rate of 6 per 100 CM problems managed.

Other treatments

The rate of other treatments provided (26 per 100 CM problems) was average for BEACH. Physical medicine/ rehabilitation was provided at a rate of 5.6 per 100 CM problems; advice/education at 3.5 per 100. Procedures were recorded at 11 per 100 CM problems.

Referrals

Referrals were provided for 13 per 100 CM problems, higher than the BEACH average (8 per 100). These were made most frequently to physiotherapists (5 per 100 CM problems).

Pathology and imaging orders

The pathology test ordering rate of 16 per 100 CM problems was lower than the BEACH average (25 per 100). Full blood count and ESR were most commonly ordered (3 and 2 per 100 of these problems respectively).

The imaging order rate (16 per 100 CM problems) was higher than the BEACH average (6 per 100 problems). The most common imaging orders were X-ray of the knee and densitometry tests (2 per 100 CM problems managed).

Conflict of interest: none.

References

- O'Halloran J, Miller GC, Britt H. Defining chronic conditions for primary care with ICPC-2. Fam Pract 2004;21:381–6.
- Classification Committee of the World Organisation of Family Doctors. ICPC-2: International Classification of Primary Care, 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.



The patien		- ()		Chronic musculoskel	etal (CM)			Prescribed medications		
Gender Percent Rate ^(a)			problems (n=7597, 7.5 per 100 patient encounters)				(n=5459, 72 per 100 CM problems)			
Male 35.5 5.8				Specific conditions				Rate per 100 CM problems ^(c)		
Female 64.5 8.3			'		f CM pro	hlems		Paracetamol	12.4	
Age group Age specific rate ^(a)			→	Osteoarthritis*	. Om pro	34.7	←	Meloxicam	6.7	
0–24	2.7	0.9		Osteoporosis		14.2		Paracetamol/codeine	6.1	
25-44	13.2	4.0		Back complaint*		11.8		Alendronate	5.5	
45-64	37.6	9.9		Arthritis unspecified*		7.9		Diclofenac sodium systemic		
65-74	-74 20.5 12.2 Rheumatoid arthritis				6.8		Tramadol	4.6		
75+	26.0	13.0		Shoulder syndrome*		6.1		Celecoxib	4.5	
							_	Calcium carbonate	2.1	
				`				Risendronate sodium	2.0	
Reasons for	or encounter	•						Oxycodone	1.9	
(n=12 999, 1		VI encounters)					L			
	-	100 CM encounte	ers ^(b)					<u> </u>		
			22.7	-			Other treatments			
•			17.3				(n=2006, 26 per 100 CM problems)			
			10.4	8.1			Rate per 100 CM problems Physical medicine/rehabilitation			
, , ,			8.1							
, , , ,			6.5			Advice/education*			3.5	
•			6.3				Counselling – problem* 3.			
	otom/compla	aint	5.2							
Immunisat			3.4		4	7				
		3.4				Referrals				
General ch	neck up*		3.3					er 100 CM problems)		
		*				(11–371, 1	о рс	Rate per 100 CM probl	ems ^(c)	
Other prob	olems mana	aed				Physiotl	nera	-	5.2	
(n=6952, 94 per 100 CM encounters)								c surgeon	2.9	
Rate per 100 CM			1 encoi	encounters(b)		Rheuma			1.4	
			1 01100	13.9		Neurosi		_	0.6	
Hypertension* Lipid disorders*			4.8							
Immunisat				3.7	\					
Diabetes*				3.6	Path	Pathology				
Oesophagus disease				3.5		(n=1219, 16 per 100 CM problems)				
Depression*				3.0	(11=1.	Rate per 100 CM problems ^(c)				
Sleep disturbance			2.4	Full	Full blood count 3.1					
Anxiety			1.6		Erythrocyte sedimentation rate			1.9		
Ischaemic heart disease			1.4		active p			1.3		
Prescription all*				1.4	lma	Imaging				
	*****						er 10	00 CM problems)		
		counters in each ge		0 0 1	,			Rate per 100 CM pro	blems ^(c)	
Expressed as a rate per 100 encounters at which at				at least one chronic X-ray k			·			
musculoskeletal problem was managed						Densitometry test			1.7	
 Expressed as a rate per 100 chronic musculo Includes multiple ICPC-2 and ICPC-2 PLUS c 				ai problems managed		Ultrasound shoulder				