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Mis-perception and inadequate pain management in cancer patients

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Cancer pain is a complex, multifaceted problem that may originate directly from the tumor and its manifestations or indirectly from diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. Other factors as psycho-social, spiritual and existential issues influence the nature of pain experience. Pain remains a highly prevalent problem for patients with cancer; current estimates suggest that around half of the cancer patients experience pain during the disease trajectory and three quarters in patients with advanced disease. Unfortunately, despite the mounting knowledge about pain and the availability of effective pharmacology and other therapeutic modalities, pain remains pervasive and significantly mal-treated. Reports of under treatment of cancer pain persist in various clinical settings and are currently recognized as a significant health-care problem, causing unnecessary and unjustified suffering. WHO analgesic ladder serves as the mainstay model of treatment for the relief of cancer pain and appropriate utilizing of opioid drugs remains the cornerstone of adequate pain relief. Yet, substantial practice variability exists among clinicians who treat cancer patients in pain and despite the availability of wide array of therapeutic options, pain remains frequently under treated. Among the most important barriers to effective cancer pain management are clinician-specific factors such as insufficient knowledge of pain mechanisms and treatments, poor assessment practices and often, excessive concerns about physical dependence, patient tolerance, psychological addiction and side effects. Other factors related to the patient himself, family and health care system may as well interfere with an appropriate approach to pain management. Accordingly, the persistent under treatment of cancer pain leads to significant suffering associated with declines in function and quality of life. In this brief presentation, the following cancer related pain issues are reviewed: Analgesic treatment modalities, pain assessment, the current effective opioid utilization and the methods to overcome the barriers to pain management.

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