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New research indicates 80% of patients still in moderate to severe chronic pain despite one year of treatment

Year-long tracking survey demonstrates that 15% feel that their pain has become worse

European Federation of Chapters of the International Association for the Study of Pain (EFIC) Congress, Lisbon (10 September 2009): 80% of patients are still suffering from moderate to severe chronic pain¹ after one year of treatment² and only 6% are being prescribed strong opioids, according to a year-long survey presented today at the EFIC Congress. The research reveals that more than half of patients' pain levels fail to improve over the course of a year's treatment and for 15%, their pain has become worse. Despite the high proportion of patients continuing to suffer pain, 40% of patients believe they are taking the most appropriate level of medication and 59% believe that everything is being done to help them.

The new survey, entitled PainSTORY (**Pain Study Tracking Ongoing Responses for a Year**), is the first of its kind to track the impact of chronic pain on patients' lives over the course of a year and involved 294 patients in 13 European countries, including 25 Irish patients.

Regarding pain management, the survey demonstrates that out of all patients who took part in the survey, 82% are prescribed medication for their pain, but 64% also resort to over the counter (OTC) medication to control it. Despite the fact that 80% of patients receiving treatment are suffering from moderate-to-severe pain, only 6% of them are being prescribed a strong opioid treatment, 18% a weak opioid and 41% are prescribed a non-opioid treatment. The research also reveals that only 6% had their prescription changed to a stronger dose of pain medication over the course of the year.

The survey illustrates almost half of all patients report side effects as a result of their medication the most common of which is constipation³, experienced by more than half of patients, 49% of whom are receiving treatment with opioids. Although highly effective in controlling pain, opioids can be associated with opioid-induced constipation (OIC). The research indicates that 26% of patients

¹ Rating 4 or more out of 10 on a pain scale

² Treatment includes prescription medication, over the counter medication and alternative medication

³ The term 'constipation' incorporated bloating, stomach ache and stomach cramps

taking opioid medication turn to laxatives to help relieve their constipation, which may alleviate symptoms but will not address the cause of the problem.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Tony O'Brien, Consultant Physician in Palliative Medicine at Cork University Hospital said: 'This research reveals an alarmingly high prevalence of uncontrolled chronic pain in our communities. This serious public health problem must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Patients suffering pain require comprehensive evaluation and assessment by skilled health care professionals. Selected patients will benefit from a supervised trial of opioid medication in order to achieve an optimal level of analgesia, whilst preventing unwanted opioid adverse effects, including opioid induced constipation. The objective is to ensure that patients can experience the best possible quality of life.'

The research also provides some valuable insights into patients' experience of the healthcare professional team. Despite the high proportion of patients continuing to suffer pain, the number of Irish patients visiting a doctor declined over the course of the year from 95% at the beginning of the survey to 68% at the end. By the end of the survey of all patients, 58% had been given a physical examination, 22% were rated on a pain scale, 19% were sent for further tests and only 2% had seen a pain specialist consistently throughout the year.

According to Dr. Brona Fullen, President of the Irish Pain Society, "this Pan European qualitative survey reports on how chronic pain affects patient's quality of life. The effects of chronic pain on personal relationships, family life, and the ability to work have a huge impact. It also highlights the need for good communication between patients and their healthcare professional to maximise patient care and reduce the side effects of medications. The limited number of specialist Pain Centres in Ireland is an issue which needs to be addressed. Multidisciplinary Pain clinics and programmes should be available nationwide to maximise patient care and improve their quality of life."

Across the year, 46% of Irish patients report feeling alone in tackling their pain and 55% of patients feel anxious or depressed as a result of their pain. For 15% of patients, their pain is so bad they report they sometimes want to die. Patients report feeling trapped by a pain which may vary in intensity, but continuously affects every aspect of their life.

Commenting on the findings of the survey, Hans Kress, President Elect, European Federation of Chapters of the International Association for the Study of Pain said: "This research presents a unique insight into patients' journey in pain across Europe. It is shocking to observe that one year on, patients are still trapped in an ongoing cycle of pain and a large proportion seem to be losing

hope. I urge patients to speak to their doctor if they are experiencing chronic pain or are concerned about side effects and not suffer in silence”.

-ENDS-

Note to editors

About the survey

PainSTORY (**P**ain **S**tudy **T**racking **O**ngoing **R**esponses for a **Y**ear) is the first study of its kind to track patients with chronic pain over one year, providing in depth insight into how pain impacts the daily lives of patients and the management of pain in 13 European countries.

The PainSTORY survey was conducted by an independent research company, Ipsos MORI, in collaboration with the following independent third parties:

- European Federation of IASP Chapters
- World Institute of Pain
- OPEN Minds

Methodology

294 patients suffering from non-malignant (osteoarthritis, back pain / lower back pain, osteoporosis, neuropathic pain, mixed pain, other long term pain), chronic pain (i.e. lasting for more than three months) rating ≥ 5 -10 on a pain scale at screening stage (where 0 = no pain and 10 = the worst pain imaginable) completed the survey. Respondents were studied for 12 months and research was carried out in 13 countries across Europe: United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands and Norway by an independent research company, Ipsos MORI.

The study consisted of four waves of qualitative interviews between April 2008 and May 2009. Interim engagement activities such as diaries and 'life books' were sent to patients between the four waves to provide additional insight. Comparisons between baseline data and subsequent wave results showed how the impact of pain and pain management changes over the course of a year.

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