

Chronic Pain: backgrounder

What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is defined as continuous, long-term pain that has lasted for more than six months, or that continues after the time that healing would have been thought to have occurred.¹ Chronic pain can also occur when no obvious cause for it can be found; this is thought to be due to changes in the body's nervous system.² Chronic pain can persist for months or even years and can be very difficult to treat.³

What causes chronic pain?

Chronic pain can occur anywhere in the body. It may follow an illness or an injury that appears to have healed or may develop for no apparent reason. Chronic pain is divided into two classifications: nociceptive and neuropathic and causes can be various.⁴

All people will experience nociceptive pain at some point and it includes such things as an injury, cut or burn. Conversely, neuropathic pain is caused by a problem with the nerve pathways, which means the way that the nerve sends pain messages to the brain is affected.⁵

Chronic pain may follow an illness or an injury that appears to have healed or may develop for no apparent reason. Chronic pain can occur anywhere in the body, with back pain being the most commonly reported type of chronic neuropathic pain.⁵

Who is affected by chronic pain?

Chronic pain is a widespread problem with 1 in 5 adults in Europe – or 75 million people - affected.⁵ Women are more likely to be affected by chronic pain than men.⁵

Chronic pain is more common among manual workers and the unemployed than among professional workers and more common among those dependent on social assistance than the general population.⁶

Chronic pain can make people struggle to undertake physical and social activities as well as making people feel tired, depressed and anxious. However, there are treatment options available which can help people manage the pain and get more involved in social and physical activities again. One of these is Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS).

Impact of chronic pain

Despite its prevalence, chronic pain remains one of the most poorly understood and undertreated conditions in health care. Lower back pain causes more disability than any other condition in the world. In Europe:

- Chronic pain is thought to be one of the most common conditions for which people seek medical attention.⁴
- More than 50 per cent of chronic pain sufferers wait at least two years before their pain is adequately managed.⁷

- Approximately one third of people with chronic pain are not being treated, while only two per cent are being treated by a pain management specialist.⁵
- On average, 38 per cent of Europeans with chronic pain report that their pain is not adequately managed with conventional medical management.⁷
- The patients in the survey in Pain in Europe had lived with chronic pain for an average of seven years⁸, and almost one fifth had suffered for up to 20 years.⁹
- One third of patients reported being in constant pain. Without relief or the hope of relief, many patients lose the ability to eat, sleep, work and function normally.⁹

Chronic pain may have a serious impact on quality of life, including impaired physical and social functioning and reduced energy and vitality.⁹ Activities of daily living may become increasingly difficult, particularly when the pain is severe.

- The Painful Truth report found that more than a third of people with chronic pain struggle with routine daily tasks affecting their work and personal lives, their relationships and the ability to care for their children¹⁰
- Many patients develop depression and anxiety or have trouble sleeping. Feelings of isolation and belief that the pain has become the focus of the patient's life are common.¹¹
- When treatment fails, chronic pain patients may feel that committing suicide is a solution. The risk of suicide in chronic pain patients is at least doubled.¹¹
- Many people are unable to continue working because of their pain, in fact one in five people living with pain have lost their job as a result of it⁸ and 16 per cent are forced to change their job responsibilities.⁸

Treatments available for chronic pain

With an ageing global population, increasingly sedentary lifestyles and shrinking health budgets, there is an urgent need to find effective and lasting treatments to reduce the burden on our health systems and alleviate back pain for millions of sufferers.

Common treatments for chronic pain include over-the-counter pain relief such as aspirin, paracetamol and ibuprofen, which are used for mild-to-moderate pain. Narcotics, such as codeine and morphine, are used only for severe pain. They may cause serious side effects and there is a risk that patients will develop tolerance or chemical dependency.¹² Other drugs such as anaesthetic nerve blocks, muscle relaxants, antidepressants, anticonvulsants (drugs used to treat seizures) and corticosteroids may be effective against certain types of pain.

Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS)

Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) is a minimally invasive option for people with chronic pain that has not been relieved by conventional medicines or other treatment options. SCS, sometimes known as neuromodulation, is a reversible way of managing chronic pain which has been used safely and effectively for almost 40 years, with around 14,000 patients receiving SCS implants per year.¹³

SCS involves implanting a small battery powered device under the skin and thin wire (known as a lead), usually in the abdomen, upper buttocks or in the area of the collar bone to target the specific areas of pain.

The device is connected to a lead which delivers stimulation waves to the brain, alleviating pain. SCS can be used to treat people with more than one particular pain including back or neuropathic pain.

Boston Scientific

Boston Scientific transforms lives through innovative medical solutions that improve the health of patients around the world. As a global medical technology leader for more than 30 years, we advance science for life by providing a broad range of high performance solutions that address unmet patient needs and reduce the cost of healthcare. For more information, visit us at www.bostonscientific.eu.

For more information about SCS, chronic pain or Precision™ NOVI visit:

<http://www.bostonscientific.com/en-EU/news/newsroom-uk/chronic-pain.html>.

Media contacts:

Sharron Tansey
Market Access,
Health Economics &
Government Affairs
+44 7770 834 947
TanseyS@bsci.com

Rosie Ireland
Weber Shandwick
+44 207 067 0190
rireland@webershandwick.com

References

- 1 Hornberger et al. Rechargeable Spinal Cord Stimulation Versus Nonrechargeable System for Patients With Failed Back Surgery Syndrome: A Cost-Consequences Analysis Clin J Pain 2008;24:244-252
- 2 Policy Connect. About Chronic Pain. <http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/cppc/about-chronic-pain> Accessed March 2012
- 3 Brunton S. Approach to assessment and diagnosis of chronic pain. J Fam Pract. 2004;53(10 Suppl):S3-10. Accessed at : http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0689/is_10_53/ai_n6249279/?tag=content;col1
- 4 Galluzi. Management of neuropathic pain. Journal of the American Osteopathic Association. 2005; sup 4 (105):S12-S19
- 5 Breivik H et al. Survey of chronic pain in Europe: prevalence, impact on daily life, and treatment. Eur J Pain 2006;10:287
- 6 Løyland B, Miaskowski C, Wahl AK, Rustøen T: Prevalence and characteristics of chronic pain among long-term social assistance recipients compared to the general population in Norway. Clin J Pain 2010, 26:624–630
- 7 Pain Proposal: Improving the Current and Future Management of Chronic Pain. A European Consensus Report 2010
- 8 British Pain Society. Pain in Europe - A Report
- 9 Smith BH et al. The impact of chronic pain in the community. Fam Pract 2001;18:292–9.
- 10 The Painful Truth report
- 11 Tang et al. Suicidality in chronic pain: a review of the prevalence , risk factors and psychological links. Psychol Medicine 2006; 36:575-58611
- 12 Stanos S. Appropriate use of opioid analgesics in chronic pain. J Fam Pract. 2007;56:23-32.
- 13 International Neuromodulation Society. <http://www.neuromodulation.com/spinal-cord-stimulation> Last accessed May 2015

CAUTION: The law restricts these devices to sale by or on the order of a physician. Indications, contraindications, warnings and instructions for use can be found in the product labeling supplied with each device. Information for the use only in countries with applicable health authority product registrations.