



SIP 2011: EFIC's Roadmap for Action shows the way forward to improved pain management across Europe

A summary of the symposium

Introduction

On 3 and 4 May 2011, a major conference took place in the European Parliament to discuss the "Societal Impact of Pain" (SIP 2011). The symposium was supported by all three European institutions and the Hungarian presidency and was organized by EFIC – the European Federation of IASP (International Association for the Study of Pain) Chapters. EFIC is an umbrella organization in the field of pain science and medicine, consisting of the 35 National Pain Societies officially approved by IASP (so-called IASP Chapters). EFIC's commitment to create awareness for pain is longstanding. It started in 2001 with the declaration on "Chronic Pain as a Major Healthcare Problem, a Disease in its Own Right" at the European Parliament¹.

SIP 2011 provided a forum for all relevant stakeholders including patient representatives, pain specialists, policymakers and regulators to discuss the current situation and future needs, resulting in the adoption of a concrete 'Roadmap for Action' for improved pain care in Europe.

The story behind chronic pain

Acute pain is an important body guard and functions as a warning signal. However, when the pain remains for more than 3 months and becomes chronic it has no longer a healing function. Chronic pain is a specific healthcare problem and has a high and increasing prevalence. According to a 2006-2007 survey commissioned by the European Commission's Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General in the EU-25², an average of 25% of citizens experience pain affecting muscles, joints, neck or back lasting for 3 months or more, significantly limiting their ability to carry out daily activities³. The prevalence of patients suffering from severe pain in Europe is approximately 5%⁴. Pain is especially a common problem amongst the older population⁵. Considering the ageing European society, the prevalence of pain is to increase in the years to come.

¹ European Federation of IASP Chapters. EFIC's Declaration on Chronic Pain as a Major Healthcare Problem, a Disease in its Own Right. Presented at the European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, October 9, 2001, after endorsement by 25 European Chapters of the International Society for the Study of Pain.; www.efic.org/pain-efic-declaration.php

² The EU-25 Member States of the European Union before enlargement in 2007.

³ EU Barometer 272e; survey requested by Directorate General SANCO and coordinated by Directorate General communication

⁴ Kantar Health Inc. Aug. 2009. National Health and Wellness Survey, 2008 [EU]. Princeton, NJ.

⁵ Bergh, 2003, J Pain Symptom Management



Pain: a costly matter



Direct costs of pain consist of healthcare related costs such as the cost of interventions and therapies for treating pain. For example, the Belgian Federal Knowledge Centre in Healthcare (KCE) estimated the direct costs of only back pain in Belgium to be €272 million in 2006.

Besides this, there are tremendous indirect healthcare costs related to chronic pain caused by ineffective interventions, lack of appropriate facilities, inappropriate (self-)medication and treatment by patients or health care professionals. Furthermore, chronic pain is a costly burden on society due to disability claims, reductions in productivity, absenteeism and costs related to social care and support of people suffering from pain. Moreover, an underestimated part of the total cost derived from chronic pain is the cost of informal care provided by families and of intangibles associated with the deterioration in the quality of life of patients and their families.

The very high economic burden of both direct and indirect costs of back pain was confirmed in a German study⁶. Extrapolating results to the German adult population between the ages of 18 and 75 years, led to an estimated €48.96 billion in direct and indirect back pain-related costs, which is equal to 2.2% of the German GDP⁷.

Issues related to pain

Even though the societal costs of chronic pain are comparable to those of cancer or cardiovascular diseases there is still insufficient professional and public awareness of the societal impact of pain. Chronic pain is a specific healthcare problem that is often mistakenly perceived as a symptom of a disease or injury and is not well understood as was confirmed by Dr Anne Berquin, Vice-President of the Belgian Pain Society: *“The difficulty of chronic pain management shows that the current way of understanding health and disease is inappropriate.”*

Diagnosis and management

Across Europe, there is insufficient information and access to pain diagnosis and management for patients, families and care takers. Nonetheless, progress has been made since EFIC's declaration on pain in 2001: chronic pain has been recognized as a disease in its own right in some European countries and regions. The Scottish government, for example, has recognized chronic pain as a long term condition in its own right and consequently established a national chronic pain steering group which is responsible for spreading best practices across the country, pain related education and research and establishing guidelines for pain management.

⁶ Wenig CM et al., Costs of back pain in Germany, Eur J Pain (2008), doi:10.1016/

⁷ In 2007 the German GDP was €2428.20 bn – (source: Bruttoinlandsprodukt, Vierteljahres- und Jahresangaben - Statistisches Bundesamt). The total expenditure on health in 2007 was 10.4% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (source OECD Health Data; stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=HEALTH)



A number of additional initiatives have been highlighted as best practice. In Italy, pain care has become a priority objective of the National Health Service. The Ministry of Health defines guidelines for publicity, development and coordination of regional policies and has made €350,000 available for information campaigns and an additional €2,450,000 to educate health care professionals. Furthermore, pain diagnostics and therapeutic procedures will become integrated in Italy's reimbursement system. Lastly, Italy has simplified prescription rules which ensure easier access to pain medication.

Education and Research

Education and research in pain management is needed at all levels, from patients to universities and healthcare professionals. Best practice was identified for example in Spain, where a research and education project was carried out with the support of the WHO in 2005. The results of the educational program show that symptom control and patient satisfaction were improved and a significant cost saving was reported in Catalonia, the area in Spain where the program was rolled out⁸.

Roadmap for Action

The SIP 2011 Roadmap for Action, which was presented to EU governments and institutions, outlines the key issues which the EU institutions and member states should address to effectively reduce the societal impact of pain across Europe:

1. Acknowledge that pain is an important factor limiting the quality of life and should be put on top of the priority list of the national health care system.
2. Activate patients, their family, relatives and care-givers through the availability of information and access to pain diagnosis and management.
3. Raise awareness of the medical, financial and social impact that pain and its management has on patients, their family, care-givers, employers, and the healthcare system.
4. Raise awareness of the importance of prevention, diagnosis and management of pain amongst all healthcare professionals, notably through further education.
5. Strengthen pain research (basic science, clinical, epidemiological) as a priority in EU framework programme and in equivalent research road maps at national and EU level, addressing the societal impact of pain and the burden of chronic pain on the health, social, and employment sectors.
6. Establish an EU platform for the exchange, comparison and benchmarking of best practices between member states on pain management and its impact on society.
7. Use the EU platform to monitor trends in pain management, services, and outcomes and provide guidelines to harmonize effective levels of pain management to improve the quality of life of European citizens.

⁸ Gomez-Batiste X, Porta-Salez J et al. Catalonia WHO palliative care demonstration project at 15 years (2005). *J Pain Symptom Manage* 2007; 33:584-590



Pain impacts a tremendous amount of people directly or indirectly across all EU member states. With this Roadmap for Action EFIC and the 85 endorsing organizations hope to make a leap forward and improve the quality of life of chronic pain patients and lower the burden of economic costs.

About the multi-stakeholder platform Societal Impact of Pain (SIP)

The "Societal Impact of Pain" (SIP) is an international platform created in 2010 and aims to raise awareness of the relevance of the impact that pain has on our societies, health and economic systems, exchanging information and sharing best-practices across all member states of the European Union, and developing and fostering European-wide policy strategies & activities for improved pain care in Europe. The platform provides opportunities for discussion for health care professionals, pain advocacy groups, politicians, insurances, representatives of health authorities, regulators and budget holders.

Responsibility for the scientific framework of the SIP platform rests with the European Federation of IASP® Chapters (EFIC®). The pharmaceutical company Grünenthal GmbH is responsible for logistics, support and organisation.

For more information, please visit www.sip-meetings.org.

About EFIC

The European Federation of IASP® Chapters (EFIC®) is a multidisciplinary professional organisation in the field of pain science and medicine, consisting of the 35 European National Pain Societies approved by IASP (International Association for the Study of Pain), the so-called National Chapters. Established in 1993, EFIC's 35 constituent Pain Societies represent close to 20,000 scientists, physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and other healthcare professionals across Europe, who study pain and treat patients suffering from pain.

For more information, please visit www.efic.org.

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