

## The burden of chronic pain

Pain is a common health state in many chronic diseases and Chronic Pain (CP) itself can be considered a chronic health condition in respect to health care policy. Although CP is common, there is currently little published robust pan-European and Maltese epidemiological data on CP and its impact on sufferer's quality of life and economical burden for sufferers, their families and health and social systems.

As we know chronic pain occurs in 19% of European adults, negatively affecting their daily, social, and working lives; most patients do not receive pain treatment and 40% receive an inadequate one. Indeed, according to published data (Pain in Europe Survey/Eurostat), it is estimated that there are more than 95 million people (15-65 years of age) suffering from CP in Europe. Chronic Pain has a significant negative economical impact on health systems, affecting daily activities and the ability to work of chronic pain sufferers. In fact, CP persons are more frequently absent from work and are also forced to retire from work earlier than other people at working age. In Europe, the number of leave-days taken because of CP is estimated to be about 500 million. The total cost for European systems for CP is equivalent to about 300 billion euro/year.

Technically, CP is an on-going or recurrent pain lasting longer than the time of normal healing for an illness or injury, or lasting more than 3 to 6 months. As such it is a major global health issue as it affects approximately 37% of individuals in developed countries.

Aside its ample prevalence CP causes a substantial burden to the individual and the individual's family as it contributes to the sufferer's physical and mental dysfunction and disability. Accordingly, CP impedes activities of daily living, work and work efficiency, and often reduces quality and quantity of life.

In Malta there is still much work to do on pain management and in order to implement congruent health-care policies there is an urgent need to evaluate the prevalence of chronic pain condition within the Maltese population and to explore how individuals perceive their pain, the impact it has on their lives, their perception of the attitudes of others towards their pain, treatments received and its adequacy.

No Pain Foundation - with the approval of the Maltese Health Ethics Committee and the support of the Directorate for Health Information & Research (DHIR) of the Maltese Ministry for Health - is carrying out a nationally representative survey on the extent and the nature of chronic pain in the Maltese population. This is indeed an area of increasing public health concern, especially in view of an ageing demographic and the association of increased longevity and morbidity with chronic conditions. No Pain Foundation's research project titled "Chronic pain in Malta: prevalence, treatment and its impact on social and daily life". The large scale prospective and observational study is based on the administration of an ad hoc questionnaire using phone-call-survey methodology and the study population will be Maltese resident adults, speaking Maltese and/or English. It is planned to approach about 5,000 people ( $\geq 18$  years of age).

All findings will be communicated to national government to improve policy-making regarding the societal impact of pain in Malta.

The SIP Symposium 2017 is for Malta an important event which will help us to address concrete steps directed at Maltese government in order to improve policy making regarding the societal impact of pain.



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