

Best Doctors® REPORT

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IN THIS ISSUE

- p.1** A word from Best Doctors
- p.2** Chronic disease and chronic pain defined
- p.3** Chronic disease and the workplace
- p.3** Is pain management being mismanaged?
- p.4** Making a difference with healthy living
- p.4** How Best Doctors can help



A Word from Best Doctors

Chronic pain affects millions of Canadians every day. It takes a huge economic toll, adding up to billions of dollars in health costs and lost productivity, yet it's still poorly understood. It affects one in five Canadian adults and is the most common reason that Canadians seek health care, accounting for up to 78 percent of visits to the emergency department.¹

Although it's endemic, a true understanding of chronic pain and how to treat it eludes many in the medical field. This can lead to mismanagement when it comes to treatment, which can have severe consequences. Canada is the world's second-largest per capita consumer of prescription opioids, and deaths related to their use have doubled in just over 10 years in Ontario.² It is this kind of statistic that has sparked a debate over whether traditional pain medications are being over-prescribed, ultimately doing more harm than good for some patients.

Although different from chronic pain in many ways, chronic disease also has huge implications for employee productivity, because it must also be managed over a long period of time. With July 10th having been designated as National Chronic Disease Awareness Day, chronic disease comes under the spotlight this summer.

Like chronic pain, chronic disease comes with high costs, both to the health care system and to lives that end up being derailed, not only physically, but mentally too – having a medical condition is one of the strongest risk factors for having depression.³ Meanwhile, 50 percent of those waiting for care at Canadian pain clinics have moderate to severe levels of depression and nearly 35 percent report thinking about suicide.¹

While these figures are bleak, all is not lost. Help is available for patients suffering from chronic diseases and chronic pain. With the right medical practitioner guiding them in the right direction, there are steps that patients can take to improve their quality of life, leading to better outcomes for individuals, workplaces and the health care system.

“Canada is the world's **second-largest** per capita consumer of prescription opioids, and deaths related to their use have **doubled** in just over 10 years in Ontario.

[1] The Canadian Pain Society, June 2014
[2] Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
[3] Canadian Mental Health Association

Chronic disease and chronic pain defined



Patients suffering from chronic disease and chronic pain are both afflicted over long periods of time. Chronic disease is defined as one that lasts three months or more, while chronic pain is defined as any pain that lasts more than 12 weeks.

Here's a more in-depth look at each:

Chronic disease

- Chronic diseases are long-term diseases that develop slowly over time, often progressing in severity. While they can often be controlled, they can rarely be cured.
- There are four main types of chronic diseases: cardiovascular diseases (e.g. heart attack and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma) and diabetes.⁴ Chronic depression is also categorized as a chronic disease.
- Chronic diseases may significantly impair everyday physical and mental functions, reducing a person's ability to perform daily activities.
- Worldwide, chronic diseases have overtaken infectious diseases as the leading cause of death and disability.⁵

Chronic pain

- Chronic pain is different from acute pain in that acute pain is a sensation that alerts us to possible injury, while chronic pain persists for several months or longer.
- Chronic pain may arise from an initial injury, or there may be an ongoing cause, such as illness. There may also be no clear cause for chronic pain.
- Other health problems such as fatigue and mood changes often accompany chronic pain.

While diagnosing a chronic disease such as asthma or diabetes is usually straightforward, a chronic pain diagnosis is often more complex. When chronic pain is invisible (i.e. the patient hasn't suffered severe bodily injury), it can sometimes be hard to convince others that you suffer from it.

Both chronic disease and chronic pain severely affect a person's quality of life and after diagnosis, need to be properly managed to enable the sufferer to carry on with normal routines as much as possible. But getting help can be difficult: In more than a third of publicly funded pain clinics in Canada, the average wait time is more than a year, and there are swaths of the country that don't have pain clinic services at all.⁶

When it comes to chronic diseases, medications help manage many conditions. However, although chronic diseases such as diabetes and arthritis are becoming more commonplace in an aging society, Canada is the only country in the world with a universal health care system that does not include pharmacare for all its citizens. Without a benefits plan (either through an employer, private insurance or a provincial program), drug costs can be a significant barrier to managing a chronic disease.

With chronic disease and chronic pain being so prevalent among Canadians, there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to diagnosis and treatment.

“The abuse of prescription pain medication isn't just a local issue, it's a **global epidemic.**”

[4] World Health Organization
[5] "Preventing and Managing Chronic Disease: Ontario's Framework," Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, May 2007

[6] "Chronic pain poorly understood, costing Canada billions," CBC News, June 2014

[7] "Managing chronic disease in the workplace," Benefits Canada, December 2011

[8] Public Health Agency of Canada, Spring 2014

Chronic disease and the workplace

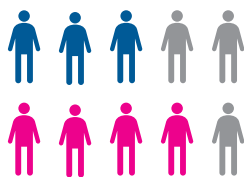
Chronic disease impacts workplaces in several ways. When an employee suffers from a chronic condition, employers experience a loss of productivity due to absenteeism, presenteeism and short-term disability. In fact, employees suffering from a chronic illness reported spending about 48 minutes of their workday dealing with their condition.⁷ When an employee suffering from chronic pain or a chronic disease misses time at work, there are other costs too, including the health impact on co-workers who have to handle extra workflow.

So what can employers do to minimize the impact and reduce the costs of chronic conditions on their employees and, in turn, on their workplace? When it comes to chronic disease, prevention is key, and employers who implement programs that promote healthy workplaces may see improvements in the lives of their workers, which will in turn help lower

costs related to absenteeism and short-term disability. Examples of wellness programs include weight management or smoking cessation programs, lifestyle or health coaching and health promotion resources.

Considering that 62 percent of Canadians are overweight, 46 percent are not active enough and 20 percent smoke, employer-sponsored wellness programs have the potential to have a huge impact.

It's also important for employers to adopt a broader perspective when it comes to the health of their employees. Changes in individual behaviour are more likely to be successful when employers implement strategies that will positively influence the work environment. 21 percent of employees said their workplace is a barrier to reaching personal health or fitness goals, with lack of time identified as the biggest culprit. It's much easier for employees to change individual habits when they're doing so within a supportive framework in which their employer adopts policies that support healthy behaviours.



3 out of 5 Canadians 20 years and older have a chronic disease, and **4 out of 5** are at risk of developing a chronic condition.⁸



Treatment of chronic disease consumes **67 percent** of all direct health care costs, costing the Canadian economy **\$190 billion annually** (\$68 billion is attributed to treatment and the remainder to lost productivity).⁹



It is estimated the cost of chronic pain in Canada is at least **\$56 - 60 billion annually**.¹



73 percent of people waiting for care at Canadian pain clinics report the pain interferes with their normal work.¹

Is pain management being mismanaged?

The statistics are alarming: use of opioids such as OxyContin and Codeine - routinely prescribed painkillers - are tied to one in eight deaths in young adults.¹⁰ And a review of opioid related deaths in Ontario discovered that pain medication-related deaths are increasing.

The abuse of prescription pain medication isn't just a local issue, it's a global epidemic. It's estimated that between 26.4 million and 36 million people abuse opioids worldwide.¹¹ Abuse of prescription opioids is costly on many levels - there are the economic costs, social costs and of course the lives lost as a result of opioid addiction and abuse.

So what can be done to combat this growing scourge? Shockingly, the Canadian Pain Society reported that veterinarians receive five times more training in pain management than physicians.¹ With this in mind, a good starting point would be more in-depth training for doctors when it comes to pain management.

Ultimately, it comes down to considering each patient's individual circumstances and unique needs very carefully when treating a person suffering from chronic pain. Physicians may also want to consider alternative treatments to high-risk painkillers, such as acupuncture, which has been found to work for pain caused by osteoarthritis and headaches, as well as pain in the back, neck and shoulders.¹²

[9] Canadian Family Physician
[10] "OxyContin and other opioids tied to 1 in 8 deaths in young adults, Ontario study shows," CBC News, July 2014

[11] National Institute on Drug Abuse, May 2014

[12] Acupuncture May Offer Real Relief for Chronic Pain," TIME, September 2012

Making a difference with healthy living

Many of the risk factors for chronic disease are largely within our control. Major chronic diseases, such as diabetes, stroke and cardiovascular disease, also share common risk factors. These include poor nutrition, physical inactivity, smoking and excessive alcohol intake. So when it comes to chronic disease, prevention is key and making lifestyle adjustments can have a huge impact.

Consider the following:

- An unhealthy diet may lead to obesity, a risk factor for certain cancers, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.
- Smoking is a major cause of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and lung cancer, and also puts you at a higher risk for heart disease.
- Long-term alcohol use has been linked to an increased risk of liver cancer as well as a higher risk of cancers of the mouth, throat and esophagus.

When it comes to chronic pain, prevention isn't always possible. However, the balance between a person's individual risk factors (e.g. a poor diet or sedentary lifestyle) and protective factors (e.g. being active and eating healthfully) may help determine whether an acute problem progresses to chronic pain. Maintaining good physical and mental health is the best way to prevent or cope with chronic pain.

This means:

- Treating health problems early
- Getting enough sleep
- Being physically active
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet
- Reducing stress in our daily lives

In short, our daily decisions make a big difference, and this should give us comfort, as we have the ability to take control of our health to a large extent. Taking the right steps every day to maintain optimal health will go a long way towards helping prevent and manage chronic diseases and chronic pain.

How Best Doctors can help

Although nearly seven million Canadians are affected by chronic pain, there are less than 400 pain clinics in the country, leaving many patients forced to wait over a year for an appointment. In some remote parts of the country, chronic pain patients don't have any access to proper care.

Given the physical and mental impact on the sufferer, not to mention the effect on their workplace, co-workers and loved ones, chronic pain patients need far more support than what is available to them.

This is where a service like Best Doctors comes in – rather than waiting several months to be treated by a pain specialist in Canada, Best Doctors members can get immediate access to the top pain specialists in the world through Best Doctors' database of 53,000 medical specialists. After all records have been collected, the member will receive their diagnosis

and treatment recommendations in only seven to ten days. Through services like Ask the Expert, Best Doctors specialists can also answer any questions a member may have about their condition or about pain medication they've been prescribed.

The Ask the Expert service, along with Best Doctors 360°, is also useful for patients who have been diagnosed with a chronic disease, providing members with answers and resources to help them better understand and manage their condition.

Chronic pain and chronic disease patients may also benefit from Best Doctors' InterConsultation service, especially in cases where a member hasn't been given a clear diagnosis or wants to be sure they've received the right diagnosis and/or treatment plan. Given the long-term impact of a chronic condition on a patient's life, getting the right diagnosis and the right treatment plan is critical.



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When you're facing an uncertain medical situation, call Best Doctors. We'll provide clarity and understanding, helping ensure you get the right information, the right diagnosis and the right treatment.