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Update on prevalence of pain in patients with cancer: Systematic review and meta-analysis

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Context: Cancer pain has a severe impact on quality of life and is associated with numerous psychosocial responses. Recent studies suggest that treatment of cancer pain has improved during the last decade.

Objectives: The aim of this review was to examine the present status of pain prevalence and pain severity in patients with cancer.

Methods: A systematic search of the literature published between September 2005 and January 2014 was performed using the databases of PubMed, Medline, EMBASE, CINAHL, and Cochrane. Articles in English or Dutch that reported on the prevalence of cancer pain in an adult cancer population were included. Titles and abstracts were screened by two authors independently, after which full texts were evaluated and assessed on methodological quality. Study details and pain characteristics were extracted from the articles with adequate study quality. Prevalence rates were pooled with meta-analysis; meta-regression was performed to explore determinants of pain prevalence.

Results: Out of 4117 titles, 122 studies were selected for the meta-analyses on pain (117 studies, n=63533) and pain severity (52 studies, n=32261). Pain prevalence rates were 39.3% after curative treatment; 55.0% during anti-cancer treatment; 66.4% in advanced, metastatic or terminal disease. Moderate to severe pain (NRS ≥ 5) was reported by 38.0% of all patients.

Conclusion: Despite increased attention for the assessment and management, pain continues to be a prevalent symptom in patients with cancer. In the upcoming decade we need to overcome barriers towards effective pain treatment and develop and implement interventions to optimally manage pain in patients with cancer.

Biography

Marieke H J van den Beuken-van Everdingen, MD, PhD is trained as an Internist, Consultant of Palliative Care and Pain Specialist for Oncology patients. She completed her dissertation "Symptoms in Patients with Cancer" in 2009. Her research is embedded in the Centre of Expertise in Palliative Care in Maastricht and the University Pain Clinic Maastricht (UPCM), the Netherlands. Her expertise is on Opioids and Management of (Neuropathic) Pain. She guides several PhD students and is the (co-) author of >20 international peer-reviewed publications. She is the Chair of the Centre of Expertise Palliative Care and a member of several national guideline working groups and involved in the national training programmes for palliative care.

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