

SIGN 136

Management of chronic pain *A national clinical guideline*



Background and need for a guideline

Chronic pain, defined for the purposes of this guideline as pain that has been present for more than 12 weeks, is a major clinical challenge.

Across Europe approximately 18% of the population is currently affected by moderate to severe chronic pain. It has a considerable impact on quality of life, resulting in significant suffering and disability.

While a proportion of patients will require access to specialist secondary and tertiary care pain services, the majority of patients are managed in the community or primary care. It is vital that general practitioners and other healthcare professionals have the best possible resources and support to manage their patients properly and have facilities for accessing appropriate specialist services when required.

Within Scotland there is evidence of wide variation in clinical practice, service and resource provision, with a general lack of knowledge about chronic pain and the management options that are available.

It is hoped that this evidence based guideline will provide the information needed to improve clinical outcomes and quality of life for patients with chronic pain.

The challenge for healthcare professionals is to...

- identify chronic pain and the type of pain to inform the selection of treatment options most likely to be effective
- signpost patients to self help materials at an early stage of their journey
- understand that one therapy does not suit every patient and different therapies may need to be tried with each individual to achieve the best long term outcomes
- ensure patients are reviewed regularly to assess their treatment for effectiveness and side effects
- consider when to refer patients for psychological, physical or other non-pharmacological therapies.

Remit

This guideline provides recommendations and treatment pathways based on current evidence for best practice in the assessment and management of adults with chronic non-malignant pain in non-specialist settings, including self management, pharmacological, psychological, physical, complementary and dietary therapies.

It does not cover:

- interventions which are only delivered in secondary care.
- treatment of patients with headache (*see SIGN 107, Diagnosis and management of headache in adults*).
- children. While chronic pain occurs in children, some of their treatment options are different to those of adults, and have not been included in this remit.
- underlying conditions. Chronic pain is caused by many underlying conditions. The remit of this guideline is restricted to the treatment of chronic pain, not specific conditions.

Potential users

This guideline will be of particular interest to all healthcare professionals involved in the assessment and management of patients with chronic pain, including general practitioners, pharmacists, anaesthetists, psychologists, psychiatrists, physiotherapists, rheumatologists, occupational therapists, nurses, patients, carers and voluntary organisations with an interest in chronic pain.

Implementing this guideline

The implementation strategy for this guideline encompasses:

- identification of the key recommendations that should be prioritised for implementation
- description of recommendations likely to have significant resource implications
- key points for audit
- guideline and supporting materials, including a patient version, available to download from the SIGN website
- dissemination of a quick reference guide to all appropriate healthcare professionals
- electronic dissemination of the full guideline to all NHS Boards
- iPhone, iPad and Android apps.

Launch event

The guideline will be launched at the Improving Chronic Pain Services in Scotland meeting, Thursday 12 December 2013, Hilton Grosvenor Hotel, Edinburgh.

