

Fast Facts on Pain Management

Fast Facts #2 – Types of Pain

CASE STUDY:

Ms. J. is a 74 year old patient with advanced cancer. She is a resident in a nursing home and having pain that begins in her abdomen that is always there, like a sore tooth, it aches all the time. She pinpoints the pain rates it as frequently a 8/10.. She wants her pain at 3/10. The pain is keeping her awake at night, which is making her irritable during the day.

1. What are the key adjectives that characterize her pain?
2. What type of pain does she have? Why is that important to know?
3. What types of medications would you expect to be ordered?

Main Teaching Points:

Patients often have more than one type of pain. Description of each pain should be carefully assessed. Ms. J. uses the adjectives "sore", "aches" which are clues for visceral or muscle pain.

Clues to Pain Type Found in Patient/Family Descriptions:

Listen carefully to how the patient or family describes the pain. Certain words can give you important information.



| Description/ Clues | Types of Pain |
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| "I ache all the time" | Visceral Pain – usually localized to the site of injury/tumor. Pain can be referred to the somatic area supplied by the same nerve root. |
| "I'm sore & stiff" "It feels like a charley-horse" | Muscle Pain – sometimes difficult to isolate as it may be due to an underlying disorder, a systemic or metabolic cause. |
| "It hurts when I move" "It aches at night" | Bone Pain – local bone pain can range from dull ache to deep, intense pain. Usually well localized and worse on movement and weight-bearing, it may be worse at night. Bone pain can be masked by muscle pain arising from involuntary, protective spasm of the surrounding muscles. |
| "It feels like my skin is burning" "It feels like someone stabbed me" "It is a shooting pain" | Neuropathic Pain – Constant, superficial burning pain is usually caused by actual damage to peripheral nerve, plexus, root or spinal cord. When a specific nerve is involved, pain is in a relatively constant area of the body surface (dermatome) but may also be referred to the somatic area supplied by the nerve. The degree of nerve pain will be effected by the degree of nerve compression or infiltration. |
| "Its worse when I breathe in" | Pleuritic Pain – patient may complain of pain on inspiration or may present with guarded, shallow breathing. |
| "Comes & goes like cramps" | Colic Pain – partial or complete obstruction of a hollow viscus can result in intermittent cramps. |
| SOURCE: Adapted from <i>A Monograph on the Management of Cancer Pain</i> , Health & Welfare Canada, 1984; <i>Cancer Pain</i> , Patt, RB, 1993; <i>Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine</i> , Doyle, Hanks, MacDonald, 1993. | |

References:

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<http://www.chcr.brown.edu/pcoc/toolkit.htm>