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Exploration of change in persistence patterns of opioid use among patients with non-cancer and cancer pain over a 3-year follow-up period

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Abstract

Background: Little is known about the different patterns of persistent opioid use and whether the patterns of clinical opioid use remain the same throughout long-term opioid therapy. **Aim:** This study explored the different patterns of persistent opioid use and changes in these patterns over time in patients with non-cancer and cancer pain. **Methods:** This retrospective cross-sectional study included patients with non-cancer and cancer pain receiving opioid prescriptions during 2013–15 at outpatient tertiary hospital settings in Malaysia. A three-dimensional (3D) persistence measure consisting of treatment intensity, frequency and distribution was used to define persistent opioid users as ‘wide’ (use opioids most of the days in a year), ‘intermediate’ (use opioids daily) or ‘strict’ (use opioids continuously to achieve a therapeutic concentration) users. The number of patients in each persistence group and changes in persistence patterns over time were recorded. **Results:** Most persistent opioid users in the non-cancer and cancer groups were defined as wide users (9.3% and 4.8%, respectively), followed by intermediate (3.1% and 0.5%, respectively) and strict (1.8% and 0.9%, respectively) users. Over the 3-year study period, a change to a less stringent persistence definition was observed in the non-cancer group, whereas no discernible pattern of change was observed in the cancer group. **Conclusion:** Changes in the patterns of clinical opioid use over time were detected among persistent opioid users in both the non-cancer and cancer groups using a 3D persistence measure. This measure, which is sensitive to changes in the clinical use of opioids over time, could affect future research and practices for better pain management involving opioids. © 2020 The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia

Author Keywords

cancer pain; medication persistence; non-cancer pain; opioids; pain; pain management; persistence patterns

Index Keywords

buprenorphine, dihydrocodeine, fentanyl, morphine, opiate, oxycodone; adult, aged, Article, cancer pain, cross-sectional study, drug use, female, follow up, human, major clinical study, Malaysia, male, pain, prescription, retrospective study

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