Elderly Hospitalised Patients—The Impact of Itch and its Prevalence

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Abstract

Introduction: Pruritus in elderly patients can have a significant impact on the quality of life but may be underestimated and poorly addressed by healthcare professionals. Materials and Methods: From March to May 2010, a structured interview questionnaire including the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI) was administered to all patients admitted to the geriatric ward in Changi General Hospital, Singapore, except for those with cognitive impairment. Results: A total of 194 patients were enrolled in the study; 94 patients (48.5%) were experiencing itch at the point of the interview; mean DLQI score for patients with itch was 6.7; 35.1% of patients experienced sleep disruption whilst 30.9% reported impairment of concentration levels as a consequence of their itch. Of the patients who had informed their doctor about the problem, 73.7% felt that doctors had not adequately addressed the cause of the itch. Among patients who reported itch, the DLQI score correlates with the severity of pruritus with a regression coefficient of 0.2737 (P <0.001); 9.6% of patients with itch were independent with their activities of daily living compared to 21% of patients who did not experience itch. Conclusion: Almost half of the subjects in our study experienced itch and a third of them reported impairment of quality of life. Patients who were independent of their activities of daily living were also less likely to experience itch. This study highlights the importance of increasing awareness of pruritus among physicians as pruritus can have adverse consequences on patients’ quality of life when left unaddressed.

Key words: Concentration, Geriatric, Inpatient pruritus, Quality of life, Sleep

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