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Frequency of Gastrointestinal Symptoms in Opioid Addict Patients: A Descriptive Study, in an Academic Centre

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE: This study aimed to determine the frequency of “*opioid induced bowel disease*” symptoms besides other demographic features.

METHODS:140 inpatients of Shahid Beheshti university of medical science hospitals were selected (internal medicine, clinical toxicology and psychiatry wards). The patients fulfilled the criteria for DSM-5 “*opioid use disorder*”, had no ongoing malignancy and related opioid or past/current surgical or medical gastrointestinal conditions. Additionally, patients were not using drugs and substances (such as amphetamines) other than opioids. In our study we included patients on these opioids: Methadone, opium and opium derivatives, heroin and tramadol. The presence of symptoms was evaluated via a direct physician-patient interview. Constipation was assessed using Rome-III criteria.

RESULTS: Of one hundred and forty patients analyzed, 134 (95.7%) were men. Mean age was 56.33 ± 15 which ranged between 22 to 86 years. 122 (87.1%) cases were married, 54 (38.6%) were occupied, 48 (34.3%) were retired and 38 (27.1%) were unemployed/housewives. The most prevalent opioid substance among these patients was “*opium and it’s derivatives*” (62.9%). Methadone (28.6%), Heroin (5%) and Tramadol (3.5%) were the next prevalent abused substances. Among analyzed gastrointestinal symptoms the most frequent was constipation (59.3%), then abdominal bloating (28.6%), heartburn (27.1%), abdominal pains (25.75%), dysphagia (22.9%), acid reflux (22.1%), nausea (12.1%), vomiting (7.9%) and diarrhea (5%) respectively.

There was a meaningful statistical relationship between the use of methadone/opium derivatives and experiencing heartburn. Surprisingly, no relationship found between route of consumption and any specific gastrointestinal symptom. Analyzing the relation between duration of abuse and symptoms, only found a meaningful one between nausea and duration.

CONCLUSION: Significant gastrointestinal symptoms which can be due to malignant or other considerable associated conditions is common among opioid abusers, let alone the impact of opioid side effects themselves on patient’s overall health and quality of life