

Enabling people-centred personalised care of pain in pharmacy

Report from an international
roundtable

2023



Colophon

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International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

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About this report

Delivering people-centred care is at the heart of pharmacy practice. FIP Development Goal 15 (People-centred care) emphasises the need to be able to deliver pharmaceutical care services for the prevention, screening, clinical management and therapeutic optimisation of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and long-term conditions (LTCs). Pain management, in particular, is a critical area where pharmacists play a significant role, as highlighted in the FIP 2022 report entitled “Empowering self-care: A handbook for pharmacists”. However, despite the high incidence of pain, patients are often hesitant to discuss it. It is necessary to comprehend the reasons behind this reluctance and establish comprehensive communication between pharmacists and patients, leading to personalised pain management and improved clinical outcomes and self-care.

At the 2022 FIP Congress held in Seville, Spain, global experts came together for a roundtable discussion on enhancing personalised pain care. Together, they aimed to explore ways of providing people-centred care in pain management and devising strategies to assist pharmacists in achieving better clinical outcomes.

The experts at the roundtable addressed the following questions:

1. What can the global pain index tell us about how people act on their pain, and how to improve their experiences with healthcare professionals?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for pharmacies to manage chronic pain conditions?
3. How can we use patient profiles to better understand patients and their personalised care needs?
4. What tools, mechanisms and approaches can enable the delivery of personalised care of pain in the pharmacy?

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It should be noted that the views expressed during the roundtable are those of the individuals based on their expertise and experience. They do not represent the views of member organisations or FIP policy or positions, although they may build on existing positions and statements.

1. Pain and the Global Pain Index

1.1 The Global Pain Index

Colleagues from HALEON joined the roundtable to elaborate on the Global Pain Index (GPI).

The GPI is a global measure of the state of pain: how sufferers experience it, how it impacts their everyday lives and how it impacts how they feel. The GPI was developed by HALEON (formerly GSK Consumer Health) through a cross-sectional study conducted consistently over the past six years and aims to examine the impact that pain has on society over time. It is a year-on-year exploration of the public's perceptions and experience of everyday pain.

In the fourth edition, GPI 4, data were collected through an online survey sent to 19,000 individuals from 19 countries who participated in the study. GPI 4 focuses on understanding how people act on their pain. The results indicate that many people delay seeking treatment for their pain, leading to unnecessary suffering. Despite the fact that pain significantly affects all aspects of sufferers' lives, many remain uncertain about how to manage their pain. Building on previous editions, GPI 4 demonstrates that pain experiences differ among various populations, revealing disparities that can leave some individuals feeling unsupported and isolated.

Roundtable participants aimed to discuss the different types of pain and its impact on the lives of people as well as the ways that the GPI can be used to enhance individuals' responses to pain and its potential to improve their experiences with healthcare providers.

1.2 Types of pain

Roundtable participants emphasised the need for a better understanding of acute and chronic pain to better understand the GPI and its applications. Acute and chronic pain are fundamentally different, and their effects on individuals can vary significantly. Managing these two types of pain requires distinct approaches due to their distinct nature and underlying causes. Typically, acute pain arises from tissue damage or inflammation, is short-lived, and can be addressed by treating the root cause of the pain alongside the use of pain medication. Chronic pain, on the other hand, lasts for more than three to six months and is often associated with a long-term condition or disease. The management of chronic pain, therefore, usually requires a multidisciplinary approach to reduce the pain and improve the patient's quality of life during treatment.

1.3 Impact of pain

Participants highlighted the significant impact of pain on an individuals' physical, emotional, and social well-being. They noted that pain can affect not only a person's physical ability to perform daily tasks but also their mental health, possibly leading to depression and anxiety. Additionally, pain may result in social isolation, with individuals becoming unwilling to leave their house or bed.

Pain can also pose an economic burden on individuals and society. It can result in reduced work productivity and, sometimes, absence from work or school. It can also lead to increased healthcare utilisation and higher healthcare costs due to medication, surgery or treatment plans.

Finally, pain can also affect those around the patient, such as the patient's family members or caregiver. They may need to take on additional responsibilities or adjust their own schedule to help the person with pain. They may also be affected financially, especially if the one suffering from pain is unable to work or provide income. Family members or caregivers may also experience emotional and psychological stress from seeing their loved one in pain and feeling helpless to alleviate it.

1.4 GPI uses and the role of pharmacists

Roundtable participants discussed the potential applications and benefits of the GPI in assisting pharmacists with pain management for their patients.

They mentioned that having an index to evaluate the impact of pain on society could draw attention to pain as a public health concern. They also highlighted that developing policies and strategies to tackle pain is a public health matter. This could also raise awareness and promote the access to pain medication as a fundamental human right. In addition, identifying trends and disparities in pain experiences across different demographics and regions can draw attention to the existing health inequities and, therefore, inform public health policies and resource allocation to improve pain management.

The GPI can also support healthcare providers, including pharmacists, to better understand the underlying cause of their patients' pain and tailor their services accordingly, such as providing appropriate medicines. It can also help in correct assessment and early diagnosis of disease, possibly preventing chronic pain or health complications. This could eventually lead to an improvement not only in patients' mental health and quality of life but also in that of those around them. The index can therefore increase awareness among healthcare providers, particularly pharmacists, of their role in managing their patients' pain and the significance of actively addressing pain and the potential benefits it can have for patients and for society as a whole.

Similarly, the GPI can raise awareness and education about pain management among the public. By providing insights into the different types of pain and the impact it can have on physical, emotional and social well-being, the index can encourage individuals to seek appropriate treatment and support for their pain. It can also raise patients' awareness of the role and expertise of their community pharmacists in addressing pain management, encouraging them to seek support from them.

2. Opportunities in the management of pain in pharmacy

Some opportunities in managing pain in the pharmacy were identified during the roundtable.

2.1 Pharmacy education and training

Pharmacy education can contribute to better pain management in the pharmacy by providing pharmacists with the necessary knowledge and skills to assess and manage pain effectively. Educating pharmacists on the different types of pain, the impact it can have on individuals and societies, and the role that they, as health providers, can play in managing it through different interventions and strategies is a great opportunity to enhance pain management in the pharmacy. In addition, education on communication skills, cultural competency and empathy are essential to providing patient-centred care for individuals with pain.

It is, therefore, crucial to integrate pain education into the curricula of pharmacy schools and to provide guidance to pharmacists on relevant pain management resources. Additionally, ongoing education and training programmes can keep pharmacists up to date on the latest developments in pain management, such as new medicines and treatment options. This will enable them to remain current and provide the highest quality care to their patients.

2.2 Communication

Participants emphasised the significance of good communication with patients to evaluate their pain and comprehend the root cause of it. Through effective communication, pharmacists can learn a lot about patients, including their background, medical history, socioeconomic status, habits and lifestyle. This allows pharmacists to have a better pain management approach tailored to suit each patient's specific needs. By demonstrating empathy, respect and willingness to listen, pharmacists can create a safe and supportive environment for patients to communicate their needs and concerns and empower them to make informed decisions about their health. It can also build trust between the patient and pharmacist, which can in turn encourage patients to share more information about their pain and be more open to following the pharmacist's recommendations for pain management.

Participants also mentioned the importance of using simple terminology to help patients understand the nature and cause of their pain, the different treatment options available, and the potential risks and benefits of each. This approach can encourage shared decision-making between the pharmacist and the patient, making the patient feel more empowered to take control of their health and to manage their pain.

2.3 Policy and advocacy

Improving pain management can be achieved by making it a priority area in public health and implementing policies that guarantee patients have access to effective pain management and care. This involves reducing barriers such as lack of insurance coverage and increasing access to pain management plans. Establishing clear policies, strategies and guidelines for pain management in the pharmacy is also important. One approach suggested by a participant was to provide guidelines and regulations for the use of pain medicines, such as opioids, to ensure patients receive appropriate care while minimising the risk of addiction or overdose.

In addition, advocacy can help to reduce the stigma associated with chronic pain and raise awareness of the need for compassionate and comprehensive pain care. By advocating for patients with chronic pain, pharmacists can help to ensure policymakers view pain management as an important public health issue and that it receives the attention and resources needed to address it.

2.4 Interprofessional collaboration and access to patient data

Participants mentioned that patients with chronic pain may require input from a range of healthcare professionals, such as doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and pharmacists, to provide a comprehensive approach to pain management. For this reason, interprofessional collaboration and shared access to patients' medical histories can improve a healthcare provider's ability to support patients in managing their pain. Such access allows healthcare providers to have a complete understanding of a patient's medical history, including past treatments and interventions for pain. This can also help avoid duplications in treatment and ensure that the patient receives the best care possible.

3. Challenges in the management of pain in pharmacy

Participants discussed the challenges that pharmacists can face in pain management.

3.1 Health literacy

A key barrier to appropriate pain management in pharmacies identified at the roundtable was health literacy. Health literacy refers to an individual's ability to access, understand and use health information to make informed decisions about their health.

Patients with low health literacy may encounter challenges in comprehending the nature of their pain and its underlying causes. They may also struggle to understand the available treatment options, proper medicines usage, and potential side effects of their medication. Low health literacy also hinders patients' ability to communicate effectively with healthcare professionals about their pain or to communicate their symptoms accurately, which can result in incorrect diagnoses and, consequently, suboptimal health outcomes. Additionally, patients with lower health literacy may not be cognisant of their ability to seek assistance from pharmacists for their pain. This applies not only to patients but also to their caregivers, who also need to be well informed and educated on the condition and treatment of the patient.

Therefore, healthcare providers, including pharmacists, must take into account their patients' health literacy and strive to enhance it when delivering treatment and advice. This includes using simple terminology to address their patients' needs and concerns and to explain the cause of pain and to provide clear instructions to patients and caregivers on medicines usage and side effects.

3.2 Socioeconomic factors

Another barrier mentioned by participants was the variation in the socioeconomic factors and in the perception and management of pain across different regions and cultures, and different age groups and genders.

In large and diverse populations, variations in beliefs and cultural backgrounds can influence people's perception of pain. For instance, certain cultures may perceive pain as a normal part of life, whereas others may regard it as a sign of weakness and may be hesitant to express their pain. These disparities can impact the way patients experience and express their pain, subsequently affecting the diagnosis and treatment plan. Another example mentioned was the variation in language across diverse populations. Patients who do not speak a region's primary language may have difficulty expressing their pain and understanding the instructions for medicines use or other pain management interventions.

Additionally, there are disparities in pain experience and pain management across genders. Women experience pain differently from men, and these differences can create gaps in the pain management services provided by healthcare professionals. This is also true for the variations in age groups and the way they experience pain.

Moreover, there may be disparities in access to pain management services for different populations. Patients from low-income or vulnerable communities may not have equitable access to healthcare services, including pain management

services, and are more likely to experience chronic pain due to factors such as poor nutrition, lack of physical activity or exposure to environmental toxins.

3.3 The subjective nature of pain

The subjective nature of pain makes it difficult to treat because healthcare providers have to rely on patients' descriptions of pain to diagnose and treat or manage pain. A patient experiencing the same type of pain as another can describe it differently based on their perceptions and experiences. This barrier also affects the management of pain since healthcare providers, including pharmacists, have to tailor their management plans to match the preferences of their patients.

3.4 Time constraints

Another challenge that pharmacists may encounter is the limited time available to deliver pain management services, given the additional duties and services they are responsible for providing. An example raised during the roundtable discussion was the experience of pharmacists in Japan, who are required to devote time to document the services they provide to patients during their interactions with them, and this limits the time available to provide pain management services and interventions.

3.5 Pharmacist reimbursement

Since pain is considered a public health concern and pain management services are deemed a fundamental human right, it is crucial that pharmacists are compensated for the pain management services they provide. Pharmacist reimbursement is critical in ensuring that patients receive the care they need while also acknowledging the important role that pharmacists play in pain management. This can eventually motivate pharmacists to be more involved in pain management services and can help increase patient access to these services, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised populations who may not have access to other healthcare providers.

4. The five patient profiles

Colleagues from Haleon elaborated on the five different patient profiles that they were able to identify throughout their research study on people who have similar attitudes and behaviours towards pain management. The five patient profiles are based on how people describe their pain and its effects on their lives as well as their openness to speak about it. The five profiles are:

1. **Pain is out of control** — Pain impacts people's quality of life and their mental health. They are open to sharing their concerns and to reaching out for help.
2. **Pain is a signal** — Pain makes them unhappy, but they are quick to treat it as they view pain as a warning sign. They are comfortable to talk to their healthcare providers about their pain.
3. **Pain is scary** — Pain causes them anxiety, and they often wait before they decide to treat it.
4. **Pain is life** — Patients make a conscious effort to manage their general health and well-being, with pain having little or no impact on their daily routine and quality of life. They are least likely to reach out for help, unless necessary.
5. **What pain?** — Patients adapt their daily routines because of pain, and they do not let it affect their lives. They usually hide their pain and feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns and needs, especially when logistical barriers such as time and cost exist.

Consequently, participants discussed how pharmacists can benefit from and use these patient profiles to better understand patients and their personalised care needs. They mentioned that patient profiling can help healthcare providers to better understand their patients' pain experiences and to provide more effective pain management interventions, resulting in improved health outcomes for patients. Profiling can help pharmacists to identify patients who are more likely to suffer from chronic pain or from complications. An example mentioned was the use of patient profiling to identify patients who are more likely to develop an addiction to opioids as a way to manage their pain and to change the course of treatment accordingly.

5. Tools and solutions for pain management in the pharmacy

Participants discussed the different types of tools and solutions that could be utilised to help pharmacists manage patients' pain. They highlighted the importance of using data and evidence from existing tools to develop more effective tools and solutions.

The tools identified are categorised into two types, based on their applicability: pain assessment tools and pain management tools.

5.1 Pain assessment tools

Pain assessment tools are those that could be used to identify the type and severity of pain that a patient is suffering from. Some of these include:

- **Pictograms** — Through visual symbols that represent the level of pain, pictograms are used to support patients to describe the severity of their pain. Pictograms can be particularly useful for patients with lower health literacy or those who have difficulty communicating due to language barriers, because they provide a simple and universally understandable way of indicating pain severity.
- **Questionnaires** — Participants stressed the importance of having a valid set of tools that pharmacists can use to assess the type and severity of pain. These questions can serve as a quick and precise way of collecting information on a patient's pain and can allow for better, patient-centred care.
- **Shared e-medical records** — Access to patient medical records and history can serve as a useful tool to provide the pharmacist with a better overview of a patient's condition, medical history and previous treatments. This also allows pharmacists to have a full understanding of a patient's health needs and ways to help them in managing their pain.

5.2 Pain management tools

Pain management tools are tools that support pharmacists in management their patients' pain. For example:

- **Digital tools and platforms** — These tools include SMS messages that can be sent to patients to remind them to take their pain medicines and can support patients in adhering to their treatment plans. Another tool mentioned was mobile applications that can send notifications or reminders to patients on their medicines or upcoming appointments with healthcare providers. In addition, social media platforms can be useful in spreading accurate health information on how to manage pain. However, it was noted that such tools may not be used by everyone, particularly the elderly population, and may not be accessible to lower income populations
- **Motivational interviewing** — This approach involves the use of open-ended questions and active listening to gain a deeper understanding of patients' health concerns, needs and preferences. Through motivational interviewing, pharmacists can empower patients to take charge of their own health and make informed decisions about managing their pain. Motivational interviewing also helps patients to identify their own motivations and reasons for adhering to their treatment plans, making positive behavioural changes, and managing their pain more effectively.

6. Conclusion

The roundtable on personalising the approach to pain brought to light the importance of addressing pain as a key priority area in health and in pharmacy. Discussions around the Global Pain Index, the types of pain and impact that pain has on individuals and societies, and different patient profiles have helped raise awareness on the importance of pain management. Key opportunities and challenges in managing pain were identified as well as some tools and solutions that can support pharmacists in the management of their patients' pain.

The following key themes emerged from this roundtable:

Opportunities in the management of pain in pharmacy:

- Pharmacy education and training
- Communication
- Policy and advocacy
- Interprofessional collaboration and access to patient data

Challenges in the management of pain in pharmacy:

- Health literacy
- Socioeconomic factors
- The subjective nature of pain
- Time constraints
- Pharmacist reimbursement

Tools and solutions for pain management in the pharmacy

- Pain assessment tools — pictograms, questionnaires and shared e-medical records
- Pain management tools — digital tools and platforms and motivational interviewing

It is, therefore, crucial to understand that pain is a complex issue that affects not only individuals but also whole societies. Pain management requires the recognition of pain as a public health issue, and that access to pain management services is a human right. It is also important to understand the importance of having a Global Pain Index and the opportunities and challenges that pharmacists can face when providing pain management services.

FIP will ensure that it embeds the needs identified in this report into its plans for 2023 and 2024 to deliver steps towards better pain management strategies for pharmacy.

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