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CHRONIC PELVIC PAIN IN FEMALE PATIENTS WITH LUTS ARRIVING AT UROLOGY CENTRES IN ITALY. THE FLOW STUDY.

Hypothesis / aims of study

Chronic pelvic pain is defined as pain, discomfort and pressure in the pelvic and perineal area, constituting part of a spectrum of abnormal sensations felt by the individual, often producing a great impact on the patient's life¹.

The present work reports on the presence of symptoms of pelvic pain in a sample of 934 women with lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) arriving at Urology out-patient clinics in Italy. In particular, the aim was to characterize the patients reporting such symptoms by their history, the presence of concomitant LUTS and sexual and bowel symptoms, the final diagnosis and the prescribed treatments.

Study design, materials and methods

The results were drawn from the analysis of baseline data collected at the enrolment visit (cross sectional phase) of the FLOW study (Female LUTS: Observational study in Women), a 2-year longitudinal, non-interventional investigation - currently ongoing - aimed at evaluating the clinical profile and the diagnostic and therapeutic management of Italian women with LUTS arriving at Urology outpatients clinics.

Women aged ≥ 18 years with LUTS for at least 3 months and negative dipstick were enrolled in 39 Urology Centres widely distributed throughout Italy between May 2002 and March 2003. They underwent a urological visit according to the routine procedures used at each centre. All the patients reporting symptoms of chronic pelvic pain were identified and characterized.

Results

Among the 934 women who arrived with LUTS, 24% also complained of pelvic pain. Pelvic pain was mostly present in women aged less than 60 years (77%), whereas the age of women who did not complain of pelvic pain was bell-shaped.

Fifty-seven percent of patients with pelvic pain were in the state of menopause, compared to 64% of women without pelvic pain. No difference was detected about the mean age at menopause and its duration between pelvic-pain and non-pelvic-pain patients (mean age: 47 Vs 49; mean duration: 13 Vs 14).

Painful defecation was more frequently observed in pelvic-pain patients (11%) than in non-pelvic-pain ones (8%).

Bladder pain was associated to pelvic pain in 77% of cases.

As to concomitant LUTS, increased daytime frequency and feeling of incomplete emptying were both more often present in patients with pelvic pain than in those without it (79% and 68% vs 68% and 46%). By contrast, urinary incontinence was mostly complained of by those who did not have pelvic pain (72% vs 53%).

Symptoms associated with sexual intercourse: 54% of the sexually active patients with pelvic pain suffered from dyspareunia (versus 24% of the patients without pelvic pain) and 23% reported vaginal dryness (vs 16% of those without pelvic pain).

Fifty percent of patients who complained of pelvic pain were not given the diagnosis of chronic pelvic pain by the investigators: overactive bladder syndrome was the commonest diagnosis in this group. Interestingly, 4% of patients who did not complain of pelvic pain, were given a chronic pelvic pain diagnosis.

The most frequently prescribed treatment was pharmacological (45% of cases); behavioural and rehabilitative therapy was prescribed in 34% of cases and surgery in 18%.

Interpretation of results

This study shows that 24% of the women with LUTS who come to Italian urologists also suffer from pelvic pain and they are relatively young.

Pelvic pain is commonly associated with other pain symptoms, including symptoms associated with sexual intercourse, and with storage, voiding and post-micturition LUTS.

In 50% of patients the symptoms of pelvic pain were so relevant in the clinical picture as to lead to the diagnosis of chronic pelvic pain by the urologist.

The longitudinal phase of the FLOW study is currently on going (one-year and two-year follow-up visits): this will permit the evaluation of LUTS and pain symptoms changes from baseline and, therefore, it will be possible to perform further analyses on pelvic pain syndrome.

Concluding message

Pelvic pain is a common feature of women with LUTS seeking help from the urologist. This symptom should always be actively searched for and thoroughly investigated by the clinicians dealing with such cohorts of patients.

References

1. The Standardisation of Terminology in Lower Urinary Tract Function. Neurourol.Urodyn 21:167-178 (2002)

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