

Heightening the awareness of headache disorders

The current issue deals with an argument that undeniably claims our attention: the emerging role of headache disorders in national healthcare plans. Recently, headache disorders officially appeared among the operative interests of the World Health Organization (WHO). Certainly, none of us overlooked the factsheet of March 2004 (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs277/en>), which developed – for the first time in WHO history – headache disorders as main official argument.

A scientific journal must also assure the diffusion of this message, especially since I believe that the social medicine of headache needs to be recognized, in its growth phase, by both scientists and physicians not yet acquainted with this condition.

The tasks suggested by the WHO message are summarized as follows:

- Public perception of headache disorders should be heightened by emphasizing the importance of supporting headache patients (prevention of risk factors) instead of merely considering drug therapy.
- Information about specialized headache centers at national and regional levels should be provided, and there should be a progressive confluence of patients into these structures.
- Press conferences should be organized to increase the consciousness

of the media regarding the social impact of headache disorders.

- Financial support should be provided for the institutional training of young doctors in the clinical management of headaches.
- Activities should be organized to raise the awareness, regarding headache, of politically relevant personalities in the healthcare field and in institutions responsible for the management of departments specialized in headache.

Therefore, in this journal, we must promote messages to achieve:

- Increased social consciousness about headache disorders through national information campaigns concerning the risk of headaches and of pathologies tied to the abuse of analgesics. This will help reduce the dissemination of information about “miracle cures”, which minimize the importance of headache disorders among both the public and the scientific world, and appear in fact, as a commercial message without concern for public health.
- Awareness campaigns finalized to re-direct resources and programs from the headache physiopathology area to the field of disabilities, which represents a direct and intangible cost in terms of pharmacoeconomy, large epidemiological workplace evaluation, and loss of

productivity. In brief, the “global headache risk” should be defined.

- Investments of pharmaceutical companies in research programs for new drugs effective in headache prophylaxis, particularly for migraine. With the currently available drugs, therapy failure and unbearable side-effects represent the most frequent causes for which patients distance themselves from the medical area.

What can we accomplish through these pages?

Since chronic headaches embody the most disabling state for patients, we have to give more attention to the rehabilitative procedures of this neglected population. The natural history of headache often leads to a chronic state. Prophylaxis represents a means to avoid this chronic pain state and to prevent the abuse of analgesics, triptans and barbiturates, which are used to stop progressive migrainous

state or chronicizing tension headaches. Scientific attention to this problem should be encouraged. In the meantime, we require a steering committee dedicated to the publication of the “Guidelines on Rehabilitation from Medication Overuse Headache in Chronic Headache Patients”, which aim to establish the controlled washout of acute headache drugs, as a preliminary step towards an effective re-prophylactic phase.

Furthermore, I believe we must promote the creation and dissemination of post-graduated training courses in headache, perhaps with the creation of university masters programs, to help improve the expertise of clinicians in this field and to provide support to general physicians, who often consult this and other scientific journals dedicated to headache disorders.

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