Administrators Give Views of Chronic Pain Management

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PALM SPRINGS, CALIF. — A clear majority of administrators from managed care organizations believe pain management programs could save money for their organizations, but only a third have such programs in place, Dennis C. Turk, Ph.D., reported at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pain Medicine.

Dr. Turk, professor of anesthesiology at the University of Washington in Seattle, analyzed the data from a survey completed by 74 administrators from managed care organizations (MCOs) ranging in size from 2,200 to 25 million patients.

The administrators considered back pain, headache, and fibromyalgia the most difficult pain management problems. Almost as many administrators (18 of 74) thought overtreatment of pain was more common as thought undertreatment of pain was more common (21 of 74).

Nearly half said the costs of treating chronic pain exceeded the costs of treating patients with other chronic diseases. They tended to believe the cost of diagnostic tests, rather than the cost of pain medication, was an impediment to pain management. They believed that good evidence supported the efficacy of rehabilitation programs (60%), but not nerve blocks (23%) or surgery (9%).

The administrators strongly advocated urine screening to monitor patients prescribed long-term opioids and the preferred use of sustained-release opioids for long-term prescriptions.

A definitive 84% of the administrators surveyed said pain management programs should emphasize self-management, but only 11% thought their organizations were doing a good job educating patients about the issue, Dr. Turk said.

Organon Pharmaceuticals USA Inc. and Ligand Pharmaceuticals Inc. sponsored the study. ■