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Comparison of the different pain assessment scales used in adult patients seen at the Philippine General Hospital, rheumatology outpatient department

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Background: Valid and reliable assessment of pain is essential in the management of rheumatologic conditions. Standardized pain assessment scales have been developed and used in clinical trials, but remain underutilized in clinical practice.

Objective: To evaluate the use of the different pain assessment scales: Numeric Rating Scale (NRS), Verbal Descriptive Scale (VDS), Visual Analog Scale (VAS) and Wong Baker Face Scale (FACES) among adult patients with musculoskeletal pain seen in a Rheumatology Out-patient Clinic in a tertiary government hospital in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Methods: This is a cross sectional study of adult patients with symptoms of musculoskeletal pain seen in a rheumatology out-patient clinic. Data were collected on demographics and disease characteristics. The patients answered the different pain assessment scales and ranked them based on ease of use and preference. Correlation of results of the different pain assessment scales using Spearman correlation was checked.

Results: Ninety- four patients are included in this study. Eighty- one percent are females, with mean age of 52 (±SD 14.12) years old. Majority (73%) have low level of education. Forty-one percent have Rheumatoid arthritis, 21% have osteoarthritis and 12% have gout. NRS is preferred and ranks easiest to use by 41.5% of patients. FACES is a close second; preferred by 39.4% and considered easy to use by 36.2% VAS ranks last on over-all preference and ease of use. On subgroup analysis, most male patients preferred the VDS while those with low education preferred FACES. The pain score obtained using NRS was significantly correlated with VDS, VAS, and FACES (p=<0.005).

Conclusion: The numeric rating scale is a validated tool that is easy to use and preferred by patients. The Wong Baker Face Scale is a good alternative tool if the patient has difficulty with the NRS. It is recommended the use of these pain scales in clinical practice in the Philippines to standardize the assessment and monitoring of pain among patients with rheumatic conditions.

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