The need for a uniform approach to paediatric pain management in emergency departments (EDs)

Pain is a subjective feeling, which is difficult to define. This is especially true for paediatric patients who compared with adults have lower pain thresholds and poor central modulation. It is well recognised that pain in this group of patients is often under-recognised and sub-optimally managed.

Many organisations have developed pain score tools and pain management protocols to help ameliorate the issues around managing pain in children, such as the guidance developed by the UK College of Emergency Medicine. However, not all general emergency departments have adopted pain management tools.

We conducted a survey of 24 emergency clinicians of all grades from senior house officer to Consultant at the Emergency Department, Wellington. The aim was to analyse their approach to pain management in this group of patients.

Our results showed that most clinicians are aware of the use of the pain score tool; however most do not use or document a pain score. Only one-third of respondents were aware of pain management guidelines.

Clinicians regarded the behaviour of the child and the mechanism of injury as the most important parameters when assessing pain, followed by parent’s input. Despite the low proportion of clinicians that document a pain score, 63% of respondents regarded a pain score as important when assessing pain.

Doctors were confident at managing mild and moderate pain. In severe pain, SHO level doctors were not confident at prescribing opiate based analgesia.

Most respondents felt there was a need for guidelines on the management of pain in children.

We believe these findings can be generalised to all emergency departments, and advocate the use of locally agreed assessment and treatment algorithms. We would welcome the development of a New Zealand guideline that could be adapted for local use in all emergency departments.

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References

