

Overview of evaluation and management of pain in children with cerebral palsy

Pain has been defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience that may or may not be associated with actual tissue damage. Pain in people with cerebral palsy (CP) is historically under-recognized and undertreated. This is particularly tragic as CP is the most common neurodevelopmental physical disability, afflicting approximately 3 out of every 1000 live births in developed countries. An estimated 60-70% of all people with CP have pain and nearly 70% of adults with CP report chronic pain (the majority of which relate to musculoskeletal pain in the back or leg). A recent study showed that 33% of these patients were unhappy with their care. In another study, 25% of CP patients with chronic pain endorsed pain that limited activities. It has been challenging for clinicians to assess pain in individuals with CP due to barriers in communication. Although self-report is ideal in measuring pain, most of these patients are evaluated by proxy. In addition, physicians have trouble localizing the source of pain in non-communicative patients; a situation exacerbated by a lack of assessment tools for non-communicative patients. As a result, treatment for these patients becomes delayed which may lead to increased cost of care. Improvements in the evaluation and treatment of CP pain are needed to improve this patient population's quality of life. This lecture will review the signs and symptoms related to the localization of pain sources and the treatment of pain to help clinicians better manage CP pain.