Psychological Aspects of Pain at Patients with Critical Limb Ischemia

Liliana Veronica Diaconescu¹, I. Diaconescu²

¹Department of Medical Psychology, University of Medicine and Pharmacy “C. Davila”, Bucharest, Romania
²Department of Vascular Surgery, Emergency Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases “Prof.Dr. C.C.Iliescu” Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT
Peripheral arterial disease is one of the major conditions that affect middle and old aged persons. Critical limb ischemia (CLI) is characterized by ischemic rest pain and painful ulceration. The pain is invalidating,
predominantly nocturnal and needs medical control. Our study aimed to describe psychological aspects of pain at patients with CLI.

Method: 46 patients with CLI (37 men and 9 women, mean age 58.6 years) were administrated West Haven-Yale Multidimensional Pain Inventory (WHYMPI) and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS).

Results: Patients showed high scores at pain severity, affective distress and low scores at life-control and general activity scales. They had high scores for anxiety and depression; both of them negatively correlating with support ($r=-.609$, $p<0.01$, respectively $r=-.479$, $p<0.05$), life-control ($r=-.704$, $p<0.01$, respectively $r=-.590$, $p<0.01$) and general activity ($r=-.803$, $p<0.01$, respectively $r=-.678$, $p<0.01$). Pain severity correlated positively with affective distress ($r=.547$, $p<0.05$) and anxiety ($r=.487$, $p<0.01$) and negatively with life-control ($r=-.544$, $p<0.05$) and general activity ($r=-.503$, $p<0.05$).

Discussions: Besides the medical treatment is important to pay attention to psychological facets of pain and mood comorbidity. Furthermore, a psychotherapeutic approach may be useful in improving the quality of life of patients with CLI.

Keywords: peripheral arterial disease, pain, anxiety, depression

**BACKGROUND**

Peripheral arterial disease is one of the major conditions that affect middle and old aged persons. Its prevalence ranges from 3% (for people aged 37-69 years old) to 20% (for people aged over 70 years old) (1). In advanced stages (III and IV Leriche) the main symptoms are ulcers and pain at rest, intolerable, nocturnal increased, needing analgesic treatment (inclusive opiates). Critical limb ischemia (CLI) is characterized by chronic ischemic rest pain, ulcers or gangrene attributable to objectively proven arterial occlusive disease (2,3). CLI is considered like a “malignant” disease - due to generalized atherosclerosis these patients are predisposed to various cardiovascular complications (e.g. myocardial infarction, strokes) which can cause death in few years (4).

The patients affected by CLI are patients generally considered difficult cases, destined to repeated approach to the health care services. Physicians have to take in charge not the pathology but to take in charge the patient. For the control of the pain it turns out essential, near the block of the perception of the pain, to act with psychological participation, in order to interfere with the perception of the pain and the meant one of the pain, modify the feelings associated to the pain, modify the behavior induced by pain (5).

As a main complaint, pain is a personal and subjective experience influenced by cultural learning, the meaning of the situation, attention and psychological variables with various psychosocial implications which can affect the quality of life.

As well, patients with PAD have high rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms (4, 7-10) which are associated with a worse outcome in their revascularized leg (11). Furthermore, having pain at rest was independently associated with mood comorbidity which may contribute to higher levels of perceived pain (12).

The aim of the study was to describe several psychological aspects of pain at patients with CLI and its relationships with anxiety and depression.

**METHODS**

**Participants**

There were recruited patients with CLI from the department of vascular surgery considering as inclusion criteria: patients diagnosed with CLI, stages III and IV Leriche, with clinical symptoms as rest pain more than one month, ulcers and gangrene. A number of 46 patients met these criteria: 37 men and 9 women, with mean age 58.6 years (aged between 33 and 76 years old).

**Instruments**

The design of the study was transversal. It comprised a single administration to each participant of the following questionnaires:

1) *West Haven Yale Multidimensional Pain Inventory (WHYMPI)* (13)

It provides a brief and comprehensive assessment of the important components of the chronic pain experience. It is a 52-item inventory which contains
12 scales divided into 3 parts:
- part I: measures the impact of pain on the patients' lives: interference of pain in vocational, social and family functioning, support from others, pain severity, self-control and negative mood;
- part II: assesses patients' perceptions of the degree to which spouses or significant others display solicitous, distracting or negative responses to their pain behaviors and complaints;
- part III: assesses patients' report of the frequency with which they engage in common everyday activities.

The questions are posed in terms of patients' perception of their pain problem and thus it provides indirect information regarding appraisals, beliefs and cognitions. Patient's responses to WHYMPI items are made on a 7-point scale. It has been demonstrated to be applicable across a variety of clinical pain conditions and has been used cross culturally.

2) Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HAD-S) (15)

It is a brief self-report questionnaire with 14 items, which assesses anxiety (HAD-A) and depression (HADS-D) as two distinct dimensions in non-psychiatric populations (16). Seven items relate to each dimension, requiring answers on a 4-point scale (e.g., from 0 = "not at all" to 3 = "very often indeed").

It has been used widely in clinical settings where anxiety and depression can co-occur with physical pathology (17). It has demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha values ranging from .68 to .93 for HADS-A, and from .67 to .90 for HADS-D (18).

Statistical analyses

The data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 software. There were computed Pearson's correlations to evaluate relation between components of the chronic pain experience, anxiety and depression.

RESULTS

The findings (table 1) showed that at West Haven Yale inventory PAD patients had high scores at pain severity, interference, affective distress and solicitous responses, and low scores at distracting responses, support, general activity and life-control.

The patients showed high scores for anxiety and depression.

Significant correlations (table 2) were found regarding different aspects of chronic pain experience. Pain severity, which correlated positively with interference ($r = .803$, $p < 0.01$), affective distress ($r = .547$, $p < 0.05$) and anxiety ($r = .487$, $p < 0.01$) and negatively with life-control ($r = -.544$, $p < 0.05$) and general activity ($r = -.503$, $p < 0.05$). Life-control correlated positively with support ($r = .650$, $p < 0.01$), solicitous responses ($r = .451$, $p < .005$), distracting responses ($r = .548$, $p < .005$), general activity ($r = .749$, $p < 0.01$) and negatively with affective distress ($r = -.620$, $p < 0.01$) and negative responses ($r = -.455$, $p < .005$).

Both anxiety and depression negatively correlated with support ($r = -.609$, $p < 0.01$, respectively $r = -.479$, $p < 0.05$), life-control ($r = -.704$, $p < 0.01$, respectively $r = -.590$, $p < 0.01$), distracting responses ($r = -.673$, $p < 0.01$, respectively $r = -.583$, $p < 0.01$) and general activity ($r = -.803$, $p < 0.01$, respectively $r = -.678$, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSIONS

The main impact of pain is due to its high severity, which has as consequence interference in patients' lives (professional, social and family) functioning and generates a high level of affective distress and a lack of perceived life-control. All these are amplified by a low social support. The pain generates affective distress, anxiety and depression, which are exaggerated by the fate of the amputation and the waiting for surgery.

The "perceived feed-back" (the responses of
Table 2. Pearson's correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interference</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Pain severity</th>
<th>Life-control</th>
<th>Affective distress</th>
<th>Negative responses</th>
<th>Solicitous responses</th>
<th>Distracting responses</th>
<th>General activity</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interference</td>
<td>-1.48</td>
<td>-0.148</td>
<td>-0.803</td>
<td>-0.484</td>
<td>-0.371</td>
<td>-0.129</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-0.372</td>
<td>0.286</td>
<td>0.328</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.287</td>
<td>-0.590**</td>
<td>-0.285</td>
<td>-0.848**</td>
<td>0.728**</td>
<td>-0.787**</td>
<td>-0.608**</td>
<td>-0.699**</td>
<td>-0.476**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain severity</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.544**</td>
<td>-0.547</td>
<td>-0.185</td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>-0.437</td>
<td>-0.505**</td>
<td>0.487**</td>
<td>0.451</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life-control</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.620**</td>
<td>-0.455**</td>
<td>-0.451**</td>
<td>-0.548</td>
<td>-0.789**</td>
<td>-0.704**</td>
<td>-0.794**</td>
<td>-0.590**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective distress</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.950</td>
<td>-0.149</td>
<td>-0.412</td>
<td>-0.623**</td>
<td>0.766**</td>
<td>0.626**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative responses</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.717**</td>
<td>-0.693**</td>
<td>-0.543**</td>
<td>-0.392</td>
<td>0.232</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicitous responses</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.503**</td>
<td>-0.527**</td>
<td>-0.293</td>
<td>-0.171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distracting responses</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.796**</td>
<td>-0.673**</td>
<td>-0.583**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>General activity</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.893**</td>
<td>-0.678**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.918**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.918**</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
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others to the patients’ communications of pain) consist especially of negative responses, while solicitous and distracting responses are given (and perceived) in a smaller percent of cases. As a large majority of patients is socially disadvantaged, the negative responses may be due not only to their disease, but to their habits (smoking, drinking, promiscuity).

There is a limited participating in common daily activities especially at aged patients with intense pain, depressed ones and without distracting responses from others.

Besides the medical treatment for pain relieving, is important to pay attention to aspects such as psychological facets of pain and mood comorbidity with their negative consequences on medical outcomes and quality of life. In this respect, considering the psychosocial implications of PAD, it will be usefully:

- to provide social support (which is beneficial in the treatment of these patients with various needs along the path of their chronic illness (19).

- a psychotherapeutic approach of these patients (for the in-patients: time-limited, needing clinician psychologist and for out-patients: combining the medical monitoring with counseling/ psychotherapy).

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