Identifying Risk and improving outcomes: Application of the GAD-7 screening tool used among patients with chronic pain in an outpatient setting

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BACKGROUND

- Chronic pain is a debilitating health condition estimated to affect 1 in 5 adults worldwide
- Pain and anxiety are very similar in that providers are unable to interpret the exact severity the patient is experiencing these symptoms
- Individuals with high levels of anxiety on average have worse outcomes with disability overtime leading to the belief that anxiety can contribute to an increase in perceived pain (Vélez, J. C. et al., 2022).

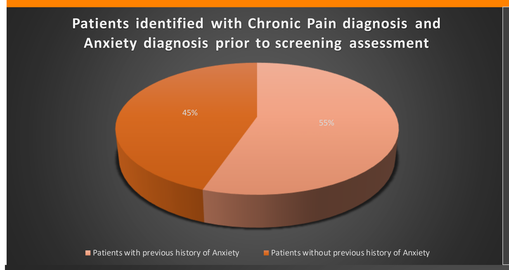
LOCAL PROBLEM

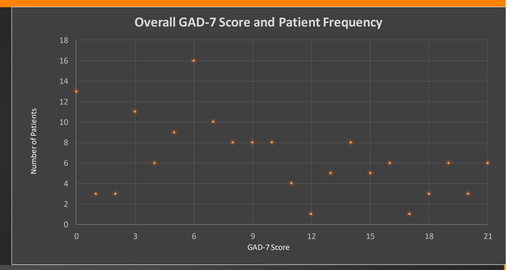
- Project Site: Outpatient facility specializing in chronic pain management located in Philadelphia PA
  - Population: Adult patients
  - Providers: Nurse Practitioners and Doctors
- Problem: Not using screening tools to identify anxiety in patients with chronic pain
- Purpose: Implement the GAD-7 anxiety screening tool in an outpatient setting that works with patients who suffer from chronic pain to identify anxiety symptoms leading to specialized psychiatric referrals
- Aims:
  - Identify undiagnosed GAD symptoms in chronic pain patients using the GAD-7 screening tool
  - Allow referrals to be made with supporting evidence to patients with identified GAD symptoms
  - Educate providers on the use of the GAD-7 screening tool and how it can be used in everyday practice

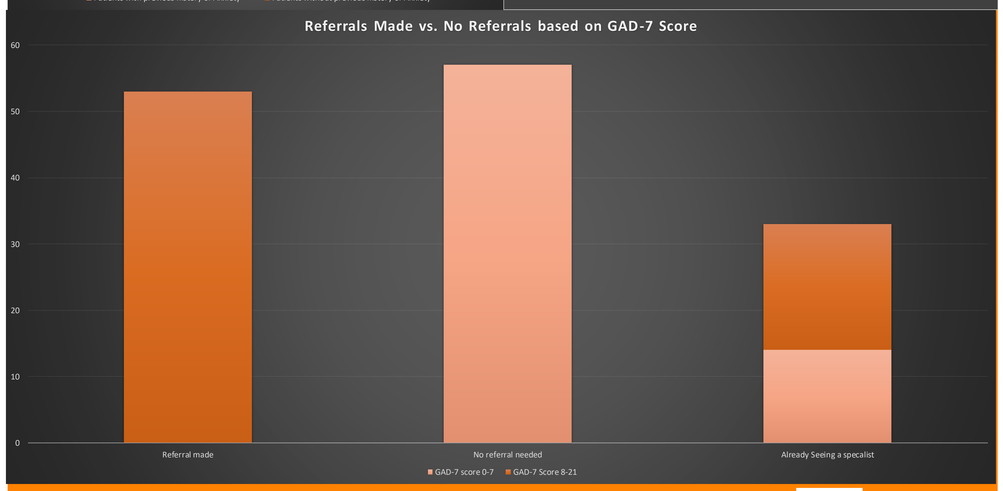
METHODS

- The Iowa Model of Evidence-Based Practice to promote Quality Care will be the guiding framework
  (Iowa model of evidence-based practice: Revisions and validation 2017)
- Literature search and critical appraisal supported the use of the GAD-7 screening tool
- GAD-7 scores were collected on patients with chronic pain – any score at or above 8 were to receive a specialized psychiatric referral
- Score were measured over the span of 2 months
- Referral rates on GAD-7 scores 8 or above were used to measure provider compliance and understanding.

Implementation of the GAD-7 resulted in nearly half of patients with chronic pain being identified with anxiety, 100% of those identified received referral







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INTERVENTIONS

- Patients (≥ 18yo) with a chronic pain diagnosis presenting follow up or initial visits were screened using the GAD-7 screening tool
- Patients with a GAD-7 score of ≥ 8 were referred for specialized psychiatric treatment.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all sure	Several days	Over half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3
	+	+	+	
Add the score for each column				
Total Score (add your column scores) =				

Developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke and colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer Inc. No permission required to reproduce, tran slate, display or distribute

RESULTS

- 100% of patients screening using the GAD-7 screening tool and received a score ≥ 8 were referred to a specialist (if not already being seen)
- 45% of patients screened had a past medical history of anxiety and chronic pain
- Over half of patients screened had a GAD-7 score ≥ 8

CONCLUSIONS

- The use of the GAD-7 screening tool led to a significant increase in identification of generalized anxiety symptoms in patients with chronic pain
- The GAD-7 screening tool became a more frequently used tool at the project site for identifying anxiety among its patient population
- Identification of anxiety in patients with chronic pain is essential when it comes to treating patients who struggle with pain symptoms

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