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.

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
- 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 received 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.

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.

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.
