The role of physical medicine and rehabilitation in pain management

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What is physical medicine and rehabilitation?

- Specialty of physicians that treat individuals with impairments and disabilities
- This group of physicians are called physiatrists

What does a physiatrist do?

- Treat patients of all ages
- Focus treatment on function
- Have a broad medical expertise that allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person’s lifetime
- Diagnose and treat pain as a result of an injury, illness, or disabling condition
- Determine and lead a treatment/prevention plan
- Lead a team of medical professionals, which may include physical therapists, occupational therapists, and physician extenders to optimize patient care
- Work with other physicians, which may include primary care physicians, neurologists, orthopedic surgeons, and many others.
- Treat the whole person, not just the problem area

What is cancer rehab??

“Cancer rehabilitation involves helping a person with cancer to help himself or herself to attain maximum physical, social, psychological and vocational functioning within the limits imposed by the disease and its treatment” Cromes 1978

- Improve quality of life
- Increase functional independence
- Improve pain, weakness and other symptoms
- Prevent other complications

Common impairments seen in cancer rehab

- Fatigue
- Arthralgia
- Myalgia
- Neuropathic pain
- Weakness
- Deconditioning
- Autonomic dysfunction
- Back pain
- Balance dysfunction
- Bowel dysfunction
- Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy
- Dystonia
- Graft-versus-host disease
- Headache
- Muscular asymmetry
- Lumbosacral plexopathy
- Neck pain
- Osteopenia/osteoarthritis
- Paralysis
- Radiation Fibrosis
- Radiculopathy
- Scapular winging
- Scar adhesions
- Sensory deficits
- Sexual dysfunction
- Shoulder pain
- Swallowing and speech issues
- Trismus
- Urinary dysfunction
- Visuospatial dysfunction

How can we help pain?

- Take a comprehensive history and perform a physical exam
- Understand the different components contributing pain
- Diagnosing the causes of pain result in more accurate treatment
- Encourage and refer for appropriate treatments like physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy
- Perform injections as appropriate to address pain
Pain

- Multiple reasons to have pain
  - Tumor pain
  - Fractures
  - Muscle strain
  - Spasticity
  - Nerve pain
  - Skin breakdown

- Treatment
  - Medication
  - PTxOT
  - Compression garments
  - Bracing
  - Interventions/Surgery

Weakness

- Can occur in legs + arms, depending on tumor location
- Can also involve changes in speech, swallowing, facial movement and vision

- Treat with:
  - Physical therapy: Focus on conditioning, endurance, strengthening legs/arms, standing, transfers (to/from a chair to a bed), walking and wheelchair mobility
  - Occupational therapy: Focus on independence with activities of daily living such as bathing, toileting, grooming, eating and dressing in addition to fine motor skills like buttons and zippers
  - Assess equipment needs like braces and ambulatory aids
  - Speech therapy
  - Vision therapy

Sensation Changes

- Variable symptoms, including
  - Pins/needles
  - Burning/shooting/stabbing pain
  - Numbness
  - Loss of joint position sense and coordination → balance issues
  - Hot/cold increase or decrease
  - Hypersensitive to light touch

- Treatment includes
  - Sensitization normalization with PT/OT
  - Balance and gait training
  - Nerve pain medications

Why care about weakness and sensory changes?

- Risk of pressure ulcers, wounds and skin breakdown
  - Learn pressure relief strategies
  - Regular skin checks
  - Nutrition education
  - Establish effective bowel and bladder program*

- Risk of aspiration and pneumonia
  - Swallow studies
  - Modified diet
  - Speech therapy to strengthen mouth muscles

- Risk of fractures
  - Treat with PT/OT
  - May need bracing or equipment
  - May need intervention

Spasticity

- Increased tone or stiffness
- Occurs when there is an injury to the spinal cord

- Treat with
  - Stretching exercises
  - Splinting or casting
  - Oral medications
  - Botox

How can you find a physiatrist?

https://members.aapmr.org/AAPMR/AA PMR_FINDER.aspx