OPIOID PRESCRIPTION AND USE PATTERNS IN FIBROMYALGIA PATIENTS: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

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Introduction

Fibromyalgia is a complex chronic pain condition that is associated with significant stigma and challenges in management. Patients often struggle to have pain acknowledged and face assumptions of opiate-seeking behavior when seeking care. However, a previous study by Fitzcharles et al. in 2011 investigated opioid use and misuse among fibromyalgia patients, and found that only 6% of fibromyalgia patients at a large pain clinic were drug-seeking. These questions have not been re-explored since guidelines were updated in 2016 advising against opioid use in this patient population.

Purpose

Our study investigates opioid use trends in fibromyalgia patients following the updated CDC guidelines in 2016

Methods

Our sample includes fibromyalgia patients who received care at a large tertiary pain center between July 2016 and January 2025, identified using Epic SlicerDicer. Manual chart review was conducted for those who had opioid prescriptions and/or were diagnosed with an opioid use disorder (OUD). Descriptive analysis was be used to determine the prevalence of opioid-based treatment, opioid prescriber agreement (OPA) violations, OUD or drug-seeking behaviors, concurrent FDA-approved pharmacotherapy, and reasoning behind opiate use. Patients who were under the age of 18 when starting care were also excluded from further data analysis.

Results

- **1079** total patients with Fibromyalgia seen from July 2016 to January 2025
- **843** patients (**78%**) were never prescribed opioids and never diagnosed with an opioid-related disorder.
- When manually reviewing the remaining **236** charts, only **57** patients (**5.3%**) were found to be using opioids from the pain medicine clinic — 36 with concurrent use (**63.2%**) of FDA-approved pharmacotherapy and 29 who were trialed on one prior to opioid initiation (**50.9%**).
- Many of the opioid prescriptions were continuations of chronic prescriptions, most commonly started by the patient's primary care physician or rheumatologist.
- The majority of patients compliant on opioid therapy had other pain conditions (e.g. lumbar stenosis, cancer)
- **16** patients had documented concern for drug-seeking behavior (**1.5%**)
- **11** patients violated their opioid prescriber agreements leading to cessation of opioid therapy (**1.01%**)
- **7** patients documented with an opioid-use disorder (**0.6%**)

Discussion

This exploratory analysis of opioid use trends among fibromyalgia patients at a large pain clinic demonstrated low rates of opioid prescriptions for fibromyalgia. This is in line with current guidelines on management of chronic myofascial pain and fibromyalgia. Opioid misuse and concern for drug-seeking behavior was also documented in only a small number of the patients reviewed. Opioid prescriptions followed two main trends: continuation of chronic use as prescribed from a previous provider and additional diagnoses of pain conditions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Due to time constraints, the chart review was limited to the prior 2015-2025 cohort, which excluded Tonmya being included as the newest FDA-approved treatment. The initial patient sample was identified using Epic SlicerDicer, so certain factors could not be evaluated for the entire sample, such as number of follow up visits or mis- or re-diagnosis. Ultimately, we revisited this study to further investigate into opioid use trends among fibromyalgia patients from a previous exploratory study.

References

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