

Mena chronic pain: Education, access, action.

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Introduction

Pain management in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces complex challenges and opportunities, spanning from prevalence and educational gaps to specific treatment modalities and policy needs. The region grapples with a substantial burden of chronic pain, necessitating comprehensive approaches to improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

Chronic pain has a substantial impact across the Middle East, with a pooled prevalence rate of 33.7%, affecting approximately one-third of the adult population. Low back pain and headache are the most common conditions, significantly impairing daily activities and quality of life. This highlights an urgent need for better pain management strategies and prevention initiatives in the region [1].

Pain education is a crucial but underdeveloped area in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Existing literature shows a significant gap in structured educational programs for both healthcare professionals and patients regarding pain mechanisms, prevention, and management. Bridging this gap is essential for improving pain literacy and promoting effective pain control strategies [2].

In Saudi Arabia, multimodal analgesia is gaining traction in postoperative pain management, aiming to improve patient outcomes by combining various pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions. Despite its known benefits, implementation faces challenges including a lack of standardized protocols, insufficient training, and limited resources, indicating a need for more integrated approaches [3].

Patients with cancer in the MENA region face significant barriers to effective pain management. These include cultural beliefs that discourage pain expression, limited access to pain specialists and medications, and insufficient healthcare provider training. Addressing these systemic and cultural obstacles is crucial for improving palliative care and quality of life for cancer patients [4].

Chronic pain management in the broader Arab region presents both considerable challenges and emerging opportunities. Challenges stem from insufficient resources, a lack of specialized training, and cultural misconceptions about pain. However, there is a growing

awareness and potential for improvement through enhanced education, integration of multimodal therapies, and policy reforms to improve healthcare accessibility for pain sufferers [5].

Healthcare professionals in Saudi Arabia demonstrate varying perceptions of pain management, with significant gaps identified in knowledge, attitudes, and practices. A notable portion underestimate pain severity and lack comprehensive training in modern pain assessment and multimodal treatment strategies. This suggests a need for targeted educational interventions to enhance pain care quality [6].

A study on opioid prescribing patterns in Saudi Arabia from 2017-2019 revealed an increasing trend in opioid consumption, raising concerns about potential misuse and addiction. While opioids are essential for acute and cancer pain, understanding prescribing habits is critical for developing balanced pain management policies that emphasize multimodal control and prevention of opioid-related harms [7].

Physical therapy interventions are effective for chronic low back pain in the MENA region, but their utilization and accessibility vary significantly. Systematic review findings suggest that a combination of exercise therapy, manual therapy, and patient education can lead to improved functional outcomes and pain reduction, highlighting the role of non-pharmacological approaches in multimodal pain control [8].

A study among physicians in Bahrain revealed suboptimal knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning pain management, particularly regarding chronic pain and opioid use. Despite recognizing the importance of pain relief, a significant proportion felt inadequately trained. This underscores the need for continuous medical education and better integration of pain medicine into curricula to enhance care [9].

Ultimately, the current state of pain management in the MENA region necessitates a clear call for action. This involves establishing national pain strategies, improving access to essential pain medications, fostering multidisciplinary pain clinics, and enhancing both public and professional education. These steps are vital for addressing the pervasive burden of pain and improving healthcare accessi-

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bility [10].

These insights collectively underscore the intricate and multifaceted nature of pain management across the MENA region. Addressing these challenges effectively requires a concerted effort involving policy makers, healthcare providers, educators, and the community to establish robust pain management frameworks, enhance educational initiatives, and ensure equitable access to care. The overarching goal is to mitigate the widespread impact of pain and improve the well-being of the region's population.

Conclusion

Chronic pain poses a substantial public health challenge across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, affecting approximately one-third of the adult population, with low back pain and headache being prevalent conditions significantly impairing quality of life [1]. A major issue is the underdeveloped state of pain education, leading to significant gaps in knowledge among healthcare professionals and patients regarding pain mechanisms and management strategies [2, 6, 9]. The broader Arab region grapples with insufficient resources, a lack of specialized training, and cultural misconceptions, though there is a growing recognition of the need for improved education and integrated multimodal therapies [5].

Specifically, in Saudi Arabia, the adoption of multimodal analgesia for postoperative pain is hindered by a lack of standardized protocols and training [3]. There's also a concerning trend of increasing opioid consumption, emphasizing the need for balanced prescribing policies that prevent misuse while ensuring access for acute and cancer pain [7]. Cancer patients in the MENA region face significant barriers to effective pain management due to cultural beliefs, limited access to specialists and medications, and insufficient provider training [4]. Despite the effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions like physical therapy for chronic low back pain, their utilization and accessibility vary [8]. Addressing these multifaceted issues requires a clear call for action, including national pain strate-

gies, improved access to essential medications, establishment of multidisciplinary pain clinics, and enhanced public and professional education to alleviate the pervasive burden of pain across the region [10].

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