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Pain and quality of life after herpes zoster: web-based prospective study

A.J.M. Wijck¹, B. Slierendregt²

¹University Medical Center Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands;

²SanofiPasteurMSD, Hoofddorp, The Netherlands

Background: Post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) is the most common complication in older herpes zoster (HZ) patients and is difficult to treat. However, long-term impact on quality of life is not known.

Methods: Between July 2010 and July 2013 we performed an observational prospective study in patients above 50 years with HZ. Participants were recruited by internet and by general practitioners within 7 days after onset of the rash. Follow-up was web-based for pain (VAS) and quality of life (EQ5D and SF-12) at 2 weeks and 1, 3 and 6 months. There were no restrictions in treatment. Significant pain was defined as pain ≥ 30 on a 100 mm VAS.

Results: A web-based prospective study was feasible in the 50+ population. We enrolled 644 patients with a follow-up of at least one month. At inclusion, 96% of the patients reported HZ-associated pain and 65% significant pain. Presence of PHN decreased to 53%, 22% and 14% of patients after one, three and six months, respectively. Significant pain was present in 16%, 5% and 3% after one, three and six months, respectively. Presence of PHN reduced QoL to a large degree.

Conclusions: Although the risk of long lasting severe PHN is low, the burden of disease is high. Preventive measures, e.g. vaccination, that reduce the risk of HZ and PHN may have a high impact on quality of life in the elderly.

Note: this study was performed with Curavista eHealth software.