

[IMAGE]

Can They Feel Your Pain?

When you're in pain, people may tell you that they "know how you feel" - but do they really know? Studies have shown that physicians tend to rate their patients' pain lower than the patients themselves in cancer and postoperative cases. Do primary care physicians also misinterpret other patients' pain levels?

A recent study in the *British Journal of General Practice* examined the variation between practitioner and patient perceptions of pain intensity. Nearly 30 general practitioners in Finland and more than 700 of their patients seeking pain relief rated the patients' perceived pain levels. A visual pain scale was utilized, with "no pain" at one extreme and the "worst imaginable pain" at the other; a person would make a mark on the scale at the place where they thought their pain level ranked.

There was little similarity between doctor and patient ratings of an individual's pain. Patients rated their pain significantly higher than did their physicians in chronic-pain cases. In other words, people who experienced long-term suffering were in more pain than their doctors realized. In fact, general practitioners rated pain intensity significantly lower than the sufferer in almost 40% of cases, and higher in 30% of cases - usually for acute pain. The most severe pain cases showed the greatest differences between patient and practitioner assessment.

It is critical that you always communicate with your doctor as openly and effectively as possible. By doing so, you can avoid possible misinterpretation of your pain levels and symptoms of serious conditions. If you suffer from chronic pain, ask your doctor or chiropractic about different methods, such as a visual pain scale, for evaluating your pain and recovery.

Reference: Mäntyselkä P, Kumpusalo E, Ahonen R, et al. Patients' versus general practitioners' assessments of pain intensity in primary care patients with non-cancer pain. *British Journal of General Practice* 2001;51, pp. 995-997.

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