

Journal Watch

Mild, Moderate, or Severe Pain Categorized by Patients with Cancer with Bone Metastases

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Abstract

Purpose: To examine how patients categorize their pain with the two commonly employed scales.

Methods and Materials: Patients with bone metastases referred to an outpatient palliative radiotherapy clinic were asked to rate their current pain on a numerical scale of 0-10 (0 = no pain, 10 = worst pain possible) and a categorized scale; none, mild, moderate and severe.

Results: Two hundred and seventeen patients were enrolled in the study. The median age was 66 years and median Karnofsky Performance Score was 70. The most common primary cancer sites were lung, prostate and breast. Based on patient-evaluated symptoms, 60% of patients who categorized pain as mild assigned it a 3 (24%) or 4 (36%), 63% who categorized pain as moderate assigned it a 5 (16.9%), 6 (19.1%) or 7 (27%) and 80% who categorized pain as severe assigned it an 8 (28.2%), 9 (12.6%) or 10 (39.8%).

Conclusion: Our patients scored pain as mild if pain was ≤ 4 , moderate if pain was 5-7 and severe if pain was ≥ 8 .

Comments

Strengths/uniqueness:

Simple methodology that builds on previous work in this area. Provides useful additional validation for determining pain intensity cut points.

Weaknesses:

Lack of clarity in defining "rating of current pain" and how this was described to patients.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

A reminder of the clinical value of giving patients sufficient explanation to get consistent results. May be useful in some situations to ask a patient to describe the pain as mild, moderate or severe in addition to giving a pain score.