OVER-THE-COUNTER TREATMENTS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH EVERY DAY, RECURRENT AND CHRONIC PAIN: PERSPECTIVES FROM CANADA AND NORWAY

Chair: Jennifer Stinson, RN-EC, CPNP, PhD, The Hospital for Sick Children Lawrence S. Bloomberg, Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto

Speakers:

- **Sølvi Helseth**, RN, PhD, Oslo and Akershus University College
- **Siv Skarstein**, RN, PhD candidate, Oslo and Akershus University College
- **Jennifer Stinson**, RN-EC, CPNP, PhD, The Hospital for Sick Children Lawrence S. Bloomberg, Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto

Symposium Abstract:

Little is known about the use of over-the-counter (OTC) and complementary and alternative treatments in children and adolescents for every day, recurrent and chronic pain problems. Pain is most often managed in the school and home setting and by primary care practitioners, while a small proportion are referred to specialized multidisciplinary pain clinics. These patients often use OTC oral and topical medications to manage pain while they seek specialized treatment. It is essential that we understand the reasons and patterns of use of these therapies so that health care providers working in a variety of settings can provide appropriate education and guidance. Furthermore, no work to date has examined whether there are differences in use by country. This workshop will outline several studies in Canada and Norway that have recently examined these issues and discuss implications of this work and future directions for research.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the reasons for and pattern of use of OTC and complementary and alternative treatments used for everyday, recurrent and chronic pain in community and clinical samples of children and youth.
2. Discuss similarities and differences between Canadian and Norwegian studies.
3. Discuss implications for practice and future areas of research.

Understanding the perspective and use of OTCs in a general adolescent population in Norway

Sølvi Helseth, RN, PhD, Oslo and Akershus University College

Dr. Helseth will present and discuss the findings from a mixed methods study on adolescents’ use of OTC pain medication in Norway. The aim of the study was to get a broader understanding of the use of OTCs in a general adolescent population by focusing on their knowledge of, their experience with, and their attitudes to the use OTC analgesics. The study was designed in three steps, starting with a focus group study, followed by a cross-sectional survey and finally individual qualitative interviews. The studies revealed that: the use of OTC analgesics has increased markedly, a large proportion of the adolescents have a very liberal attitude towards use, the indications for use are broad (not only pain), gender differences were present, parents are
the adolescents primary source of information about use of OTC, and OTCs are looked upon as almost risk-free. In addition, the qualitative studies identified different groups of adolescents with similarities in attitudes and management strategies to pain. The subjects within each group differed in how they engaged their parents in pain; how they perceived, communicated and managed pain; and how they involved emotions and used OTCs.

**Identifying the characteristics and knowledge about life experiences and Quality of Life (QOL) in adolescents with a high consume of over-the-counter analgesics (OTCAs)**

Siv Skarstein, RN, PhD candidate, Oslo and Akershus University College

Siv Skarstein will present a study which aimed to identify characteristics and increase knowledge about life experiences and Quality of Life (QOL) in adolescents with a high consume of over-the-counter analgesics (OTCAs). To achieve the overall aim, three sub-studies were conducted. In the first sub-study, a survey, we aimed to identify characteristics adolescents with a high consume of OTCAs. In the second sub-study, an exploratory qualitative study, we aimed to gain insight into life experiences of adolescents with frequent pain and high consumption of OTCAs. In the third sub-study, also qualitative, we aimed to achieve deeper insight into the development of identity in adolescents with frequent pain and high consumption of OTCAs. Our findings revealed that adolescents with a high consume of OTCAs had; more pain, more unhealthy lifestyles, lower self-esteem and less ambitious further educational plans, than those who used OTCAS seldom or never. A majority reported serious family problems throughout their childhood. The adolescents were vulnerable; they adjusted their behavior to presumed expectations and often had limited social network. Their mothers played a dominant part in their lives and the adolescents seemed to have had few opportunities to explore the world on their own. The demands placed on the adolescents throughout their childhood seemed to be more than they could handle and they learned to adapt and adjust to get attention and care. Among peers, the adolescents had experienced bullying and exclusion and they kept undermining themselves to be accepted and fit in. Pain seemed to have become an acceptable way of expressing difficulties, grief and fear.

**Understanding the Use of Over-the-Counter Pain Treatments in Adolescents with Chronic Pain: Perspectives of Adolescents with Chronic Pain and Their Primary Caregivers.**

Jennifer Stinson, RN-EC, CPNP, PhD, The Hospital for Sick Children Lawrence S. Bloomberg, Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto

Dr. Stinson will discuss the findings from a prospective, qualitative study with youth with chronic pain and their caregivers recruited from a tertiary care chronic pain clinic in Canada. The aim of the study was to understand the use of OTC from the perspectives of youth and their parents/caregivers. Findings from this study will be reviewed highlighting four themes: (1) Experience with chronic pain and medication, including the ineffectiveness of OTC medications for chronic pain; (2) Perceptions of medications and concerns with long-term medication consumption; (3) Decision making for use of OTC medications guided mainly by a trusted source or health care professional; and (4) practices of topical medication use, including barriers to usage. Implications of these findings in terms of patient education including communicating with HCP about use of these treatments will be described as well as avenues for future research.