

MUSCULOSKELETAL MATTERS

Arthritis Research UK National Primary Care Centre, Keele University

Bulletin 2:

CONSULTATIONS FOR SELECTED DIAGNOSES AND REGIONAL PROBLEMS

The Typical General Practice

- We have created The Typical General Practice from the combined details of 12 practices which contribute to our Keele GP Research Partnership.
- The Practice has 10,000 registered patients. 1,600 (16%) are aged 0–14, 4,600 (46%) are aged 15–49 and 3,800 (38%) are aged 50 and over.
- Musculoskeletal problems made up 12% of all consultations with a diagnosis.

Selected Diagnoses

- We have determined how many patients were recorded in a consultation as having selected diagnoses during one year. These could be first, new or ongoing episodes.
- In the course of one year, **osteoarthritis** was recorded for 180 patients (2% of registered patients)
 - 170 of these patients were aged 50 and over (4% of registered patients aged 50 plus consulted for **osteoarthritis**)
 - There were 300 consultations in total for **osteoarthritis**, 5% of all musculoskeletal consultations.
- During the year, also recorded were:

Gout: 40 patients

Osteoporosis: 35 patients

Rheumatoid arthritis: 25 patients

Polymyalgia rheumatica: 20 patients

Psoriatic arthritis: 4 patients

Ankylosing spondylitis: 3 patients

Systemic lupus erythematosus: 2 patients

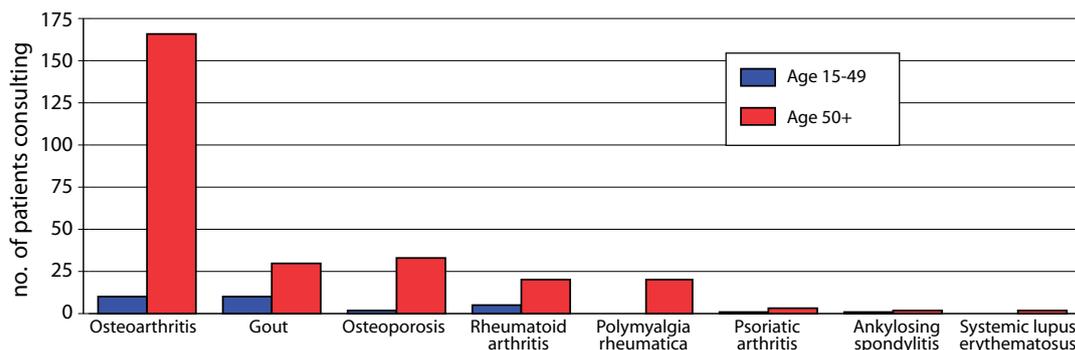


Figure 1 – Number of adult patients consulting in 1 year by condition in a practice of 10,000

These bulletins are designed to provide information for general practitioners, the primary care team, teachers, trainers and policy makers about musculoskeletal problems in practice

An alternative approach to grouping by diagnosis is to classify patients according to the GP record of location ('region') of the problem presented, for example, back or knee.

- 86% of musculoskeletal consultations were recorded as being for a single region (e.g. back, knee)
- 8% of musculoskeletal consultations were recorded as being for multiple regions
- 6% of musculoskeletal consultations had no region specified

	No. (%) of practice patients consulting	Total no. of consultations in 1 year	No. of consultations as % of all musculoskeletal consultations
Back	610 (6%)	1100	20%
Knee	340 (3%)	470	10%
Neck	240 (2%)	360	6%
Foot	220 (2%)	330	6%
Shoulder	210 (2%)	370	7%
Hand	140 (1%)	210	4%
Hip	120 (1%)	210	4%

Table – Consultations in 1 year for selected regions in a practice of 10,000

- **Back** problems were most common, 610 patients (6% of the practice population) consulting for a back problem during the year
- 340 (3%) people consulted for **knee** problems, the 2nd most common region
- The most common upper limb problems affected the **shoulder** (210 (2%) people consulting)
- In children, the **foot** was the most common region for consultation, accounting for 1 in 7 of all musculoskeletal consultations in this age group

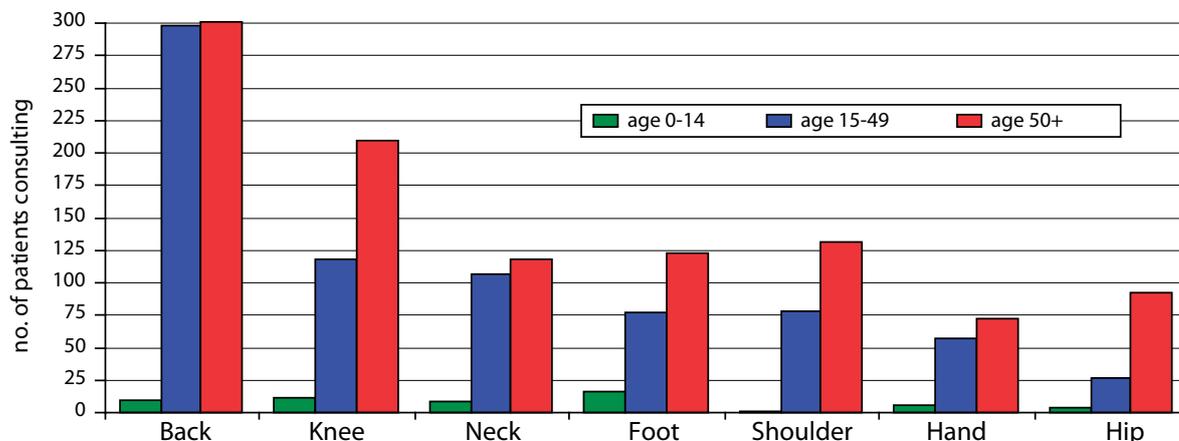


Figure 2 – Number of people consulting for problems in selected regions by age in practice of 10,000

DISCUSSION POINT

In older patients knee and hip problems are most commonly due to osteoarthritis (OA). However, only a third of patients aged 50+ consulting for knee or hip problems had a recorded diagnosis of OA.

It may be the problem was due to another disease. However, musculoskeletal problems may be more often recorded using a regional code than a diagnosis label. GPs are asked to choose a label (code) which best represents the reason for the consultation and often code the presenting symptom (hip or knee pain) rather than the underlying disease (OA). A symptom code may be selected because diagnoses often cannot be made with certainty or because it is the symptom which is the focus of the consultation.

For more information visit:

<http://www.keele.ac.uk/research/pchs/pcmrc/dissemination/bulletin/>