Irritable Bowel Syndrome Patient Experience in Canada

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Background

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic, often debilitating, functional gastrointestinal disorder with symptoms that include abdominal pain and altered bowel behaviors of constipation and/or diarrhea, affecting approximately 13-20% of Canadians. The real world experience of patients is still poorly understood.

48% of patients indicate they experience poor quality of life in an average month due to IBS

Methods

To learn how IBS affects patients in Canada, the Gastrointestinal Society hosted a survey on its English (www.badgut.org) and French (www.mauxdeventre.org) websites during spring 2016. Links to this survey were posted on social media and via invitation using a market research company. To qualify, survey participants had to be living in Canada and have IBS or be the parent/guardian of a child with IBS. Questions were on a broad range of topics, including symptom severity, medication use, experience with the health care system, comorbidities, and quality of life.

Results

Respondents from every province and territory totalled 2,961. 90% were between 30-69 years of age, 86% female, 97% were adults with IBS. 53% had IBS for more than 10 years. 35% had IBS-D, 18% IBS-C, 41% IBS-M, and 6% unsure. In IBS-C patients, abdominal pain was identified as a distinct predominant symptom. Those with IBS-D experienced many symptoms, with abdominal pain, bloating, urgency, and diarrhea identified as highly concerning. 31% experienced severe abdominal pain in the last 3 months, with severe pain being constant in a high proportion. 62% of patients indicated they experienced pain continuing after bowel movement. The top factors driving patients to see their physician were pain/discomfort and impact of IBS on their personal/professional/daily life. Approximately 93% and 49% of patients consulted with a family doctor and gastroenterologist, respectively, for their IBS. 60% had a colonoscopy. 12% have been hospitalized for IBS. 76% indicated that their symptoms interfere with everyday life and 46% missed work or school due to IBS. Most IBS patients use ≥2 medications on a regular basis to control their symptoms yet only 21% are confident their symptoms are under control. Compounding the issue, 16% are unable to afford any of their prescribed medications, and 26% can only afford some of them.

Conclusions

Canadian IBS patients suffer from multiple symptoms, with the pain experienced by patients being the prime motivating factor to seek care. 79% have symptoms not under control. The conventional standard of care for IBS requires many different treatments to manage the multiple symptoms, with the majority of IBS patients requiring 2 or more treatments on a regular basis. IBS patients experience a wide range of symptoms and comorbidities. It can be a struggle for them to find treatments that are effective and affordable.

The Gastrointestinal Society, a Canadian registered charity patient group, represents gastrointestinal and liver patients on a variety of health care fronts, including access to medications. For access to all this study's results contact:
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We received funding from Allergan Canada to conduct this independent survey.

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