Assessment of quality of life in patients with chronic urticaria in a tertiary hospital

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Introduction:
Patients with chronic urticaria commonly present to the Dermatology clinic and it has proven to be one of the more challenging disorders to treat. In Spain, the prevalence of chronic urticaria is defined as the recurrence of wheals, angioedema or both, more than twice a week for a period of 6 weeks or longer2,3,4 and can be divided into inducible urticaria and idiopathic (or spontaneous) urticaria. The objectives of this study were to assess the degree of quality of life impairment in patients with chronic urticaria and also to determine whether there is a correlation between severity of chronic urticaria and degree of impairment of quality of life.

Materials and methods:
Patients with chronic urticaria (inducible and spontaneous) who attend the Dermatology Clinic of Hospital Tuanku Jaafar, Seremban were invited to participate in this study. Patients who consent to take part in the study and are well versed in English, were given a copy of the Chronic Urticaria Quality of Life Questionnaire (English translation of the Polish version) to complete. They were also supplied with the Urticaria Activity Score (UAS7) which the patient would be required to complete for the duration of 1 week and return to the investigator.

The Chronic Urticaria Quality of Life Questionnaire (Cu-QoL) consists of 23 items divided into 6 quality of life dimensions:
1. Pruritus
2. Impact on life activities
3. Sleep problems
4. Limits
5. Looks
6. Swelling

The data was analysed using SPSS*13.0 and the degree of correlation between UAS7 and Cu-QoL was assessed using Pearson’s correlation coefficient.

Results:
Among the 20 patients in the study, 11 (55%) were females and 9 were males. The mean age of patients was 44.9 (ranging from 14-65 years) and the mean for number of years since diagnosis was 9.1 years. Angioedema co-existed with urticaria in 9 (45%) patients. There was a statistically significant correlation between the UAS7 score and pruritus severity (r=0.684), degree of impact on life activities (r=0.687) and sleep problems (r=0.445). The duration of disease also had correlation with the urticaria severity score (r=0.475). Females were noted to have a higher mean urticaria severity score and mean scores for all 6 quality of life domains but this was not statistically significant.

Discussion:
Chronic urticaria affects predominantly the middle-aged population and more commonly women. The female preponderance noted in our study and several other studies may be reflective of the autoimmune pathogenesis of chronic urticaria1,2. The long duration of the disease and co-existent angioedema in 45% of patients makes chronic urticaria a debilitating disease with significant impact on quality of life.

Among the domains in quality of life that were significantly impaired in relation to the severity of urticaria are pruritus, impact of life activities and sleep. The impact of chronic urticaria on these aspects of the patient’s life should be explored during consultations as these are areas most affected, especially in chronic and severe disease. Assessing the effect on these aspects may enable better understanding of the patient’s disease burden and help create a suitable treatment plan.

Limitations:
Only patients who were well versed in English were enrolled into this study as the Cu-QoL was available in English language and it is a patient self-administered questionnaire.

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There are no conflicts of interest

References: