



Epidemiology of Abdominal Pain

Abdominal pain is a common symptom that leads to millions of outpatient visits. National statistical surveys of the burden of gastrointestinal (GI) disease [2,5,6] have consistently identified abdominal pain as the most common symptom prompting an outpatient clinic visit. Furthermore, abdominal pain was the leading physician diagnosis for GI disorders in outpatient clinic visits in the United States in 2004 and the second most common diagnosis in 2009. In the United Kingdom, 25% of the population report abdominal pain at any one time [3].

Abdominal pain is also the major symptom associated with the most common inpatient GI diagnoses in the United States. Statistical surveys from both 2004 and 2009 [2,5,6] demonstrate that the four most common diagnoses among patients admitted for GI complaints are gallstones, acute pancreatitis, acute appendicitis, and diverticulitis. Abdominal pain is often the cardinal and presenting symptom in each of these conditions. The management of these conditions leads to considerable health care costs, with both diverticulitis and acute pancreatitis costing more than US\$2 billion in the United States alone.

Abdominal pain is the reason for referral for about 20% of patients receiving esophagogastroduodenoscopy [2]. Approximately 280,000 such procedures are performed each year in the United States, leading to substantial costs.

Abdominal pain is also the most common feature of functional gastrointestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome and functional dyspepsia. The population prevalence of these disorders is reported to be 15–25%. Functional GI disorders are one of the most common presentations in primary care and secondary care GI clinics. Approximately 5% of patients in primary care and 40% in secondary care GI clinics have a functional GI disorder, and pain is the most common and difficult to manage symptom [1]. Such patients require considerable health care resources, with annual treatment costs of US\$16.6 billion in the United States [7] and €28.4 billion across Europe [4].

In summary, abdominal pain is one of the most common reasons for presentation to outpatient and inpatient GI clinics and leads to substantial health care costs. Both organic and functional disorders of the GI tract can cause abdominal pain.

References

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