

Complex regional pain syndrome: A new model of care improving patient outcomes.

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Background:

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a painful and functionally debilitating condition associated with both sensory and motor abnormalities. It is usually associated with trauma of the affected limb and frequently utilises high healthcare utilisation. Literature indicates nearly half the number of patients diagnosed with CRPS will not return to the workforce.

It is widely accepted within clinical opinion and current literature that early recognition of CRPS can improve the outcomes for this clinical population. The Budapest Criteria is clinically utilised for diagnosis of CRPS, however, early recognition is yet to be defined. Establishing early identification guidelines within key areas of the hospital will facilitate this new model of care and ultimately improved outcomes for this cohort.

Methods:

- Developed strong collaborative relationship with pain services team
- Developed and implemented clinician resources including identification tool and clinical algorithm
- Established early and direct referral pathway to assist clinicians in the emergency department and key medical units to identify patients including regular stakeholder education

Results:

Preliminary evaluation indicates patients presenting within Melbourne Health with signs and symptoms of upper limb CRPS are being identified earlier and subsequently being referred for expert multi-disciplinary assessment and intervention earlier. Furthermore, these patients are obtaining improved outcomes including returning to daily activities and work.

Discussion:

CRPS is a complex condition with historically poor outcomes. Early identification, early intervention and a multi-disciplinary team approach is key to improving the outcomes for this cohort of patients. This new pathway has been well supported by a multi-discipline flexible and innovative team approach. Additionally, this newly implemented pathway is anticipated to reduce healthcare utilisation for patients with CRPS and could be employed in other health networks.