Supporting patients with joint pain in community pharmacy

Step 1: Presentation

- 45 years of age and over
- Patient presents with activity-limiting joint pain through:
  - Medicines use review
  - Referral from other healthcare professional
  - Self-selected OTC product
  - Advice requested

Patient-centred consultation

Information gathering

- Usage-related pain improved by rest
- Morning stiffness (duration <30 mins)
- Gradual changes in symptoms
- No hot swollen joints
- No fever or unexplained weight loss
- No immediate prior injury

- Pain worse on resting, improved by usage
- Prolonged morning stiffness (duration >30 mins)
- Rapid worsening of symptoms
- Hot swollen joints
- Systemic upset
- History of trauma or cancer

Support and refer

- Manage the patient’s acute pain as appropriate
- Pharmacist
- Non-pharmacist

- Refer to GP or acute NHS walk-in centre
- Monitor patient progress

- Refer to pharmacist

Manage

Recommendation at first presentation

- Education/information on usage-related joint pain
- Strengthening, flexibility and aerobic exercises
- Weight management if required
- NICE additional treatments if required (e.g. thermotherapy)
- Appropriate footwear (if lower limb joint pain)
- First line (topical NSAIDs)
- Monitor patient progress

Recommendation at second presentation

- If symptoms improve
  - Review first line
  - Consider second-line (paracetamol or oral NSAIDs + PPI)
  - Monitor patient progress

- If symptoms persist
  - Review first and second-line treatment
  - Consider third line (OTC opioid, e.g. co-codamol if not on paracetamol)
  - Refer to GP
  - Monitor patient progress

- If symptoms worsen
  - Review first line
  - Consider second-line (paracetamol or oral NSAIDs + PPI)
  - Monitor patient progress

Recommendation at third presentation

- If symptoms persist or worsen
  - Review first- and second-line treatment
  - Consider third line (OTC opioid, e.g. co-codamol if not on paracetamol)
  - Refer to GP
  - Monitor patient progress

The above recommendations assume no contraindications to therapy or no drug interactions exist. In such instances, refer patient to the appropriate healthcare professional.


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