Pain Assessment and Management in the Cognitively Impaired

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Background
- Pain management can be challenging in people with cognitive impairment, particularly as it may be difficult to elicit self-assessment of pain
- Research has indicated that this vulnerable group of patients are at risk of poor pain management (Bauer et al, 2016)

Aim
- To examine pain assessment, prevalence and management in patients with cognitive impairment
- To determine whether practices differ for this group of patients

Methodology
- Prospective audit of in-patient vital signs chart (pain score) and prescription chart
- Each ward audited once
- N = 472
- Collated and analysed using Excel

Results
- Demographics:
  - Demographic profile of cognitively impaired was similar to that of the overall sample
  - Predominantly female (52.1% whole dataset) (53.6% cog impaired)
  - Median age 78 (whole dataset), 84 (cognitively impaired)

- Analgesia prescribed, comparing cognitively intact and cognitively impaired patients

Conclusion
- The evidence is that patients with cognitive impairment are having their pain scored regularly
- Patients with cognitive impairment are prescribed fewer analgesics but also having lower pain scores documented.
- It is difficult to elicit if this is due to less pain or inaccuracy of assessments and documentation
- The pain scales used may not be appropriate for cognitively impaired patients.
- We were not able to verify the accuracy of pain scoring or whether the tool used was appropriate for the cognition of the individual patients

Recommendations
- Further study required to fully evaluate pain assessment and management for patients with cognitive impairment within our Trust
- Potential to include family and friends in pain assessments
- Further study required to look at why cognitively impaired patients are prescribed less analgesics