

Review of Pain in Parkinson's Disease



Watt I^{1*}, Phyu E¹, Rukavina K², Chaudhuri KR^{2,3} and Gangadharan S^{1,2}

¹Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service, Australia

²Basic and Clinical Neuroscience, King's College London, UK

³NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre, UK

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*Corresponding author: Isabel Watt, Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service, Australia

Abstract

Pain is one of the most common and bothersome non-motor symptoms in Parkinson's Disease (PD), with a significant effect on Quality of Life (QoL), yet it remains largely underrecognized and subsequently undertreated. The present review aims to discuss existing evidence on pain in PD, including its epidemiology, pathophysiology, classification and presentation, measurement and management.

Keywords: Pain; Parkinson's disease; Neurodegeneration; Management; Non motor symptoms; Dystonia; Musculoskeletal pain; Carpal tunnel syndrome

Background

Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurodegenerative condition after Alzheimer's disease [1]. It is characterized by the cardinal motor features of tremor, rigidity, bradykinesia and postural instability, as well as various non-motor symptoms, many of which were described by James Parkinson himself more than two centuries ago [2,3]. Pain is an important and prevalent non-motor symptom of PD which has gained increasing attention in the literature in recent years. Pain is prevalent in 30 to 85% of patients with PD and may vary in aetiology, location, duration and quality [1,4-6]. It frequently predates the PD diagnosis and may be more disturbing for PD patients than their motor symptoms [7,8].

Current guidelines for the diagnosis and management of pain in PD are based mainly on information obtained from case reports, small observational studies and expert opinion, while the availability of level I evidence (evidence from Randomized Controlled Trials - RCTs) remains limited. There is an urgent need to raise awareness, improve recognition and further develop treatment strategies for PD pain.

Epidemiology

The reported prevalence of pain in PD varies considerably between studies and regions, which may be due to its heterogeneity and to the lack of a clear definition [6]. It is agreed

that the prevalence is high, between 30 and 85% [6]. Indeed, in a large clinical study including 1957 PD patients conducted by Silverdale and colleagues, 85% of PD patients reported pain, with 42% describing moderate or severe pain [8].

Female gender, dyskinesia, painful medical comorbidities, and postural abnormalities secondary to rigidity and bradykinesia have all been identified as potential additional factors contributing to the appearance of spontaneous pain in predisposed subjects [5,9-10]. Notably, pain prevalence and severity seem to be irrespective of the severity of motor symptoms and of disease progression [8]. Furthermore, there is a correlation between pain in PD and other non-motor symptoms. Particularly, pain is associated with gastrointestinal and cardiovascular symptoms, reduced sleep quality as well as affective and autonomic symptoms [8,11-14].

Pathophysiology

The pathophysiology of pain in PD is complex and not fully understood but likely relates to abnormalities throughout the central and peripheral nervous system including the basal ganglia and dopamine-dependent pathways, non-dopaminergic structures and epidermal nerve fibres.

There is mounting evidence pointing towards an important role of the basal ganglia in the experience of pain [15-17]. The basal ganglia are component of what is collectively known as

the 'salience network'. The salience network is an intrinsically connected large-scale network anchored in the anterior insula and dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, which includes three key subcortical structures, specifically, the amygdala, ventral striatum and substantia nigra. This network is essential for the detection and integration of emotional and sensory stimuli [17-19].

The importance of dysregulation of dopamine-dependent pathways to the experience of pain in PD patients is now well acknowledged. In a study by Brefel-Courbon cerebral activity was investigated with positron emission tomography during experimental nociceptive stimulation. During the off phase, there was a significant increase in pain-induced activation in the right insula and prefrontal and left anterior cingulate cortices in PD patients compared with their non-PD counterparts [20]. Levodopa significantly reduced pain-induced activation in these areas [20]. Additionally, Braak and colleagues recognised Lewy bodies in the non-dopaminergic structures involved in pain processing well before the substantia nigra was involved [21]. This may be an explanation for the temporal discrepancies between pain and motor manifestations in early-stage PD [17]. Deficits in multiple non-dopaminergic neurotransmitter systems and pathways (cholinergic, noradrenergic, and serotonergic) may be another important modulator of pain perception in PD patients [3].

In PD, peripheral transmission of nociceptive inputs is impaired as well. Patients with PD showed an increase in tactile and thermal thresholds, reduction in mechanical pain perception and loss of epidermal nerve fibres and Meissner corpuscles compared with non-PD controls [22]. However, a more recent study using deep brain stimulation supports the view that the role of these peripheral mechanisms is not as important as that of central mechanisms [8].

Classification and Clinical Presentations

Classification of pain in PD has been approached in different ways, for example, by aetiology or by symptomology [23]. The most cited method of classification remains that proposed by Ford in 2010, which has subsequently been reviewed and modified [24-25]. Ford's updated classification divides pain into dystonic and non-dystonic, with non-dystonic encompassing neuropathic and musculoskeletal pain as well as unusual pain syndromes which includes those symptoms not fitting another category [4,25-26].

Defazio and colleagues summarised the frequency of these varying PD pain types in a meta-analysis, which found that dystonic, musculoskeletal and radiculo-neuropathic pain were particularly common [4]. Back and shoulder pain were also quite prevalent [4].

Alternate classification of pain type include those based on aetiology such as, nociceptive, neurogenic, and psychogenic pain, or nociceptor (subdivided into musculoskeletal, visceral

and cutaneous) and neuropathic (peripheral and central) [23]. Chaudhuri and colleagues suggest classification of PD pain into musculoskeletal, PD related chronic pain, fluctuation related, nocturnal, coat-hanger, orofacial, peripheral limb and abdominal pain [27].

Dystonic pain

Dystonic pain may be due to the underlying disease itself or as a result of on/off fluctuations under dopaminergic treatment. It manifests as dystonic spasms which are usually paroxysmal and spontaneous, or triggered by activity, and may occur in the extremities, the face and the pharyngeal muscles [28]. Long term Dopaminergic therapy has been associated with dystonia with almost 30% of patients on long term Levodopa affected [29]. Most Levodopa induced dyskinesias are choreiform, not sustained and painless. Dystonic dyskinesias have a sustained twisting nature and can be quite uncomfortable [24]. Dystonic pain can be further classified as beginning-of-dose, end-of-dose and wearing-off pain [30]. The most frequent manifestation is early morning dystonia due to dopaminergic deficiency, accompanied by akinesia and rigidity. This is a focal dystonia, usually presenting as an involuntary plantar flexion and inversion of the foot, with intensity decreasing after dopaminergic medication [30-31]. Dystonic pain is a frequent complaint in early-onset PD, where it may be associated with mutations of the Parkin or PINK gene [30].

Musculoskeletal pain

The most common form of PD pain, unexplained musculoskeletal pain, typically seems to be related to rigidity, akinesia, postural abnormalities or dystonia [30]. Clinically, patients report cramp-like pain, aching or tightness appearing typically in the neck, arm, paraspinal or calf muscles [9,13]. Some patients report rather vague (although sometimes intense) painful sensations such as ill-defined muscular or articular pain [32]. Joint pain occurs most frequently in shoulders, followed by the hips, knees, and ankles [9,30,33-35].

Radiculo-neuropathic pain

A proportion of patients also report painful, sometimes superficial and cutaneous, paraesthesias like burning, painful pins and needles or electrical charge-like sensations well localized to the territory of a nerve root [30,36]. Neurological deficits in the affected nerve root, such as numbness or weakness may also occur [24]. Postural abnormalities and dystonia can cause lumbar disc herniation and nerve or root compression leading to this kind of pain [37]. Radicular pain as an accompaniment to back pain is more prevalent in patients with PD compared with controls [38]. Carpal tunnel syndrome and compressive radial neuropathy have also been reported to have higher prevalence in patients with PD [39-41].

Central pain

Central pain in PD patients results directly from abnormalities in central pain processing. Affected PD patients usually describe it as a bizarre and unexplained painful sensation (tingling, numbness, shooting pain), intermittent or persistent [30,33,42-43]. Central pain can occur in different areas of the body including the mouth, rectum, vagina, abdomen, chest and testes [44-46]. In some patients, central PD pain occurs predominantly in the side more affected by motor symptoms and in the off state, and may be modified by dopaminergic medication [24]. However, sometimes there is no correlation between central pain and motor symptoms or dopaminergic medication [30].

Akathisia / Restless Leg syndrome

PD patients may also experience painful sensations likened to akathisia or Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) [30]. Akathisia is usually described as subjective restlessness or the painful impulse to move continually. It improves after administration of dopaminergic medication [24]. Patients with RLS usually report intense and disagreeable sensations (paraesthesia and dysesthesia) of the extremities, more pronounced in the lower extremities, and at night, improving with movement [47]. Reported prevalence of RLS in patients with PD ranges from 8% to 20%, significantly higher than the 1% prevalence found in the general population [48-49].

Table 1: Types of Pain.

Type of pain	Incidence	Features
Dystonic	4.4-33.5% [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pain involving body parts affected by dystonic postures and spasms · Often related to medications · Levodopa-induced, wearing off/morning, peak-dose, diphasic
Musculoskeletal	18.8-58.5% [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Aching or cramping confined to joints or muscles · Often involving back and shoulders · May be related to parkinsonian rigidity and immobility · Often related to comorbidities such as osteoarthritis
Radiculo-neuropathic	3.1-38% [4]	<p style="text-align: center;">Radicular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pain in the territory of a nerve or nerve root, dermatomal · Symmetrical, distal, large fibre neuropathies <p style="text-align: center;">Peripheral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Likely not related to Parkinson’s disease itself
Central neuropathic	1.7-8.5% [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Burning, tingling, boring, formication sensations · Often vague and poorly localised · Aetiology not well understood
Unusual pain syndromes	5.7% [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pain involving the head, face, abdomen, pelvis, rectum and genitalia · Not falling into one of the aforementioned categories

Measurement of pain

Pain is a difficult construct to define and assess. It is subjective and heterogeneous. The King’s PD Pain Scale (KPPS) is a well validated and widely used tool in the literature [5-6]. A patient-completed questionnaire, the King’s PD Pain Questionnaire (KPPQ), proposed by the same group, has also been validated [50]. The Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) and Short-Form McGill Pain Questionnaire (SFMPQ) are other pain scores that has been used alongside the KPPS in a large-scale clinical study of pain in PD [8].

Management of pain in PD

Dystonic Pain

Dystonia can occur as a wearing off effect, a peak dose phenomenon or diphasic (early dose and late dose); therefore, the management varies depending on its type [51]. In general, the management of dystonic pain implicates maintenance of stable levels of dopaminergic drugs, which may be achieved by pre-emptive levodopa dosing, controlled-release levodopa, or a long-acting dopamine agonist [2,28,51-53]. Continuous dopaminergic infusion with duodenal levodopa or dopamine agonists such as subcutaneous apomorphine reportedly relieve off dystonia, but

there is an urgent need for level I evidence to evaluate this [54-56]. Paradoxically, withdrawal of levodopa sometimes relieves patients of their early-morning dystonia, suggesting that the severity of dystonia results from a rebound as brain dopamine levels fluctuate [29].

Various other drugs have been reported to improve off period dystonia although RCTs are still missing. Among the available agents, benzodiazepines, baclofen and lithium are most commonly used [57-58]. Injections of botulinum toxin may also be helpful to treat focal dystonia in PD [59-60]. Both subthalamic nucleus stimulation and globus pallidus interna stimulation have been found to help dystonia in PD [61]. Intrathecal baclofen, effective for spasticity of spinal or cerebral origin, has shown little effect on the dystonia associated with parkinsonism [62]. Kodama and colleagues reported a case of improvement of ‘off period’ dystonia with repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation over the contralateral primary motor area [63].

For peak-dose dystonia, reduction of levodopa dosage may be considered. For diphasic dystonia that occurs at the beginning or end of the medication dose interval, increasing plasma concentrations by using higher doses of levodopa, or substituting

regular for controlled-release levodopa, may be helpful [64]. Amantadine has been found to have antidyskinetic properties, as well as low doses of clozapine [65-67]. High-frequency stimulation of the subthalamic nucleus or the globus pallidus interna provides an alternative approach [68].

Musculoskeletal pain

If the musculoskeletal pain occurs secondary to Parkinsonian rigidity, it is essential to optimize the dopaminergic medication. Oxycodone/naloxone prolonged release is reportedly “possibly useful” for PD patients with chronic pain [69]. Despite its adverse effects, including dizziness, headache, fatigue, worsening cognitive dysfunction, and gastrointestinal tract symptoms such

as nausea, vomiting, and constipation, oxycodone-naloxone is considered to pose an “acceptable risk without specialized monitoring” [56,69]. Non-pharmacological interventions such as physiotherapy (physical therapy, warming-up, stretching) and physical activity in general are essential for PD patients suffering from musculoskeletal pain of different origins [6].

Peripheral and Radicular Neuropathic Pain

Tricyclic antidepressants (Amitriptyline, Nortriptyline, Desipramine), selective noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors (Venlafaxine), agents that act on the voltage gated Calcium channels (Gabapentin, Pregabalin) and opioid analgesics are effective [70].

Table 2: Management of pain in PD.

Type of pain	Management
Dystonic	<p>Off dystonic pain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase dopaminergic therapy, long acting or continuous delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Baclofen · Deep brain stimulation <p>Peak dose dystonic pain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reduction of levodopa · Amantadine · Low dose antipsychotics <p>Diphasic dystonic pain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Higher doses or controlled release dopaminergic therapy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Amantadine · Low dose antipsychotics
Musculoskeletal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dopaminergic therapy directed at Parkinsonian symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Simple analgesia including NSAIDs · Physiotherapy and multidisciplinary team
Radiculo-neuropathic	<p>Radicular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rule out spinal cord compression related to Parkinsonism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dopaminergic therapy adjusted, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Analgesia · Physiotherapy · Surgical evaluation as appropriate <p>Focal neuropathic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rule out compression of nerve · Explore relationship to Parkinsonism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dopaminergic therapy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Analgesia · Physiotherapy <p>Peripheral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Investigations for peripheral neuropathy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Treat underlying aetiology · Neuropathic pain analgesia

Central neuropathic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Assess relationship to dopaminergic therapy (e.g., worsening in off state) · Dopaminergic therapy adjustment · Neuropathic pain agents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Opioids · Atypical antipsychotics
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Central Pain

Dopaminergic therapy is somewhat effective and remains the first line therapy of choice in central pain syndromes in PD. Conventional analgesics, opioids, tricyclic antidepressants and atypical antipsychotics, including clozapine, may be helpful [62].

Conclusion

Pain in PD is a distressing non-motor symptom, diminishing the QoL of those experiencing it. Our understanding of exact mechanisms of pathological pain processing in PD patients remains limited. Other sources of pain should be ruled out before attributing it to PD. The validated scores and scales quantify the pain and certainly assist follow up, particularly in cognitively intact patients. The musculoskeletal dynamics and the correlation with on-off symptomatology, guide Levodopa dose evaluation and adjustments. The management of pain in Parkinson's Disease can be quite challenging and has a telling effect on the health related QoL of sufferers. Identifying the type of pain-dystonic or non-dystonic is the first step in management and guides pharmacotherapy to be tailored accordingly.

Conflict of interest

None to declare.

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