



Medical Directors' Bulletin

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Chronic pain – new data on prevalence, impact, and NHS service provision

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December 2012 saw the publication of two important reports on chronic pain, both arising out of the Chief Medical Officer's 2008 report 'Pain: Breaking Through the Barrier', which expressed concern that the needs of people with chronic pain were being poorly served by the NHS and wider society.

Results from a special module in the 2011 Health Survey for England give us the most complete picture now available of the prevalence of chronic pain and its impact on individuals and society. The survey estimates that 31 percent of adult men and 37 percent of adult women suffer from chronic pain, of which 30/32 percent respectively suffer high interference with daily activities (grades III and IV on the van Korff scale). Only 61 percent of men and 54 percent of women with the highest grade of pain have consulted specialist pain services.

This picture is complemented by the final report of the first National Pain Audit, commissioned by the Health Quality Improvement Partnership and carried out by the British Pain Society and Dr Foster Intelligence. This three-year study assesses the availability and activity of NHS specialist centres for the diagnosis and management of complex chronic pain disorders in England and

Wales and the experience of people accessing services. Among many disturbing findings, the study shows that 28 PCTs in England do not appear to have a specialist pain service, and of the identified clinics in England only 40 percent appear to meet the criteria for a multi-disciplinary service. However, where patients were able to access specialist pain services their experience were generally good.

- [Download Chapter 9 – Chronic Pain from the Health Survey for England – 2011, Health, social care and lifestyles page](#)
- [Access the National Pain Audit](#)
- [The clinical pathways are already available \(for subscribers\) on the map of medicine webs and by the end of January be available free of charge from the \[British Pain Society\]\(#\)](#)

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