“Headache: Is a directed pathway better than the normal clinical assessment?

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Aim

Headache represents one of the commonest reasons for medical review. Our Acute Medical Clinic (AMC) sees a total 4255 patients annually, approximately 261 (6.15%) have headache. We evaluated the clinical assessment and management of patients presenting with headache and investigated the impact of instituting a pathway based on national guidelines1,2.

Methods

The initial audit was performed retrospectively between April and July 2014 (group 1) to ensure an appropriate baseline was achieved. Data were collected from hospital records and patients notes. A second audit cycle was repeated between January and June 2015 after the introduction of a dedicated algorithm. All patients presenting to clinic with headache were included regardless of whether the proforma was used or not (Groups 2 & 3 respectively). Markers of clinical performance included history and examination details recorded, as well as investigations performed and frequency of reattendance.

Results

The study population included group 1 patients (n: 59), group 2 (n: 99) and group 3 (n: 32). In the initial group both history and clinical assessment numbers were poor (graph 4&3 respectively). A slight improvement occurred with group 2 (cf group 1). With the proforma (group 3) both history and examination were significantly better compared to the other groups. The proforma group had a reduction in both the number of CT head scans requested (graph 1) as well as the number of patients re-attending the clinic (graph 2).

Conclusions

● Comparing groups 1 and 2 showed that having a basic awareness of the project alone led to an improvement in some areas.
● Using the proforma resulted in a better-documented history and examination. It’s use led to fewer CT scans, having a potential benefit to patients and NHS of £8750 annually.
● We would suggest that despite fewer CT’s performed the reduction in numbers of patients re-attending indicate that good clinical care can be as reassuring to patients as a CT scan.

3 Assuming a cost for each CT head of 125£ and an annual intake of 261 patients presenting in AMC with headache.

Link to the Proforma Algorithm

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ysc6C7shhJUpnq27LsS8Fp5BNLpGp9COg8a_4Hzaf/edit?usp=sharing

References

1. Headache: Diagnosis and Management of headaches in young people and adults [NICE Guidelines CG 150] Published date: Sept 2012
2. Diagnosis and Management of headache in Adults [Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network 107] Published date: November 2008.