

**Gaps in the Initial Management of Postherpetic Neuralgia: the BASIK PHN survey**

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**Purpose**

Postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) is continued pain due to herpes zoster for >3 months after resolution of the dermatomal rash. While annual incidence of PHN in the United States is 100,000-180,000, there is a lack of published information regarding the knowledge, attitudes, and practice patterns of US physicians on their management of PHN.

**Method**

To identify needs of physicians managing patients with PHN, we distributed a case-vignette survey (BASIK PHN: Behaviors, Attitudes, Skills, Identified gaps and Knowledge of Postherpetic Neuralgia) to a nationally representative sample of US-practicing primary care physicians (PCPs) and neurologists. The total sample included 150 PCPs and 76 neurologists. The survey presented typical patients with PHN to assess how the patient would be managed. Additional questions assessed attitudes concerning available treatment and barriers to optimal patient care.

**Results**

Less than 1 in 10 respondents indicated that they were "very satisfied" with currently available PHN treatments. Only 1 in 5 physicians were "very confident" that an initially chosen treatment would control the patient's pain. 1 in 3 PCPs and 1 in 5 neurologists responded that they do not specifically tell a patient that they have "postherpetic neuralgia" when initially diagnosed. PCPs were more likely than neurologists to include gabapentin in initial therapy choice ( $p=.004$ ). Neurologists were more likely to recommend pregabalin ( $p=.007$ ). Few PCPs would refer a patient with PHN to a specialist. Major barriers to managing patients with PHN include patients' high expectations about the level of pain relief and dose-limiting side effects.

**Conclusions**

Most respondents have not had positive experiences managing patients with PHN and were not very confident in the ability of available therapies to treat PHN pain. Information on best ways to communicate with patients about the reason for their pain as well as expected outcomes and side effects of treatment may be useful to physicians.