

Chronic neck pain common among car crash victims, but most don't sue

January 17 2014

A new study led by University of North Carolina School of Medicine researchers is the first large prospective study to evaluate musculoskeletal pain outcomes after motor vehicle collision in the U.S.

Nearly 4 million [individuals](#) in the U.S. come to hospital emergency departments for evaluation after motor vehicle collision each year. More than 90 percent of these individuals are discharged to home after evaluation. Results of the study, which enrolled individuals from eight emergency departments in four states, indicate that persistent pain is common in this population. Six weeks after their accident, more than 70 percent of individuals reported persistent musculoskeletal pain in one or more body regions. More than one third of study participants reported pain in four or more body regions.

"In the U.S., if someone develops [chronic neck pain](#) or other pain after a car accident, and they go to their doctor or tell their friends, they are often not believed or are viewed with great suspicion, as if their symptoms are not real and they are just trying to sue someone," said Samuel McLean, MD, MPH, first author of the study and associate professor of anesthesiology and emergency medicine. "Our findings indicate that persistent pain is very common among those who aren't suing, and that only a minority of those with persistent pain are engaged in litigation."

Among 948 individuals enrolled in the study, only 17 percent had contacted a lawyer for planned litigation six weeks after their accident.

Among the majority of individuals who were not planning litigation, persistent pain was still common: 28 percent had persistent moderate or severe neck pain, 13 percent had widespread musculoskeletal pain in seven or more body regions, and 4 percent had a fibromyalgia-like syndrome.

"It is hard enough to be suffering from a [persistent pain](#) condition after trauma that is moderate or severe, and/or occurring across many body regions. Unfortunately, these patients also often have to deal with the additional burden not being believed. Hopefully the results of this study will contribute to helping doctors and the public understand that these symptoms are common, including among patients who aren't suing anyone."

Provided by University of North Carolina Health Care

Citation: Chronic neck pain common among car crash victims, but most don't sue (2014, January 17) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-chronic-neck-pain-common-car.html>

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