



Injury Briefing

A review of the latest studies from Dr. Michael D. Berry.

Most Car Crash Victims Don't Sue Despite Chronic Pain

Auto injury victims have long been accused of faking their symptoms to earn a payout, but countless studies have shown that in most cases, that accusation is patently false. Now, a new study suggests that the stigma attached to auto injuries may be discouraging victims from pursuing litigation, despite the fact they suffer from chronic pain.

“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,” explained Samuel McLean, MD, MPH, lead author of the study and associate professor of anesthesiology and emergency medicine at the University of North Carolina. “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.”

In the first large prospective study evaluating musculoskeletal pain after a car accident, researchers analyzed the medical records of 948 auto injury patients at eight different emergency departments in four states. Overall, 70% of those patients reported ongoing musculoskeletal symptoms six weeks after the auto accident. Over a third of patients felt pain in four or more body regions.

Despite this persistent pain, only 17% of patients had contacted a lawyer six weeks after their accident. Among patients not involved in litigation, 28% had moderate to severe neck pain, 13% had widespread musculoskeletal pain, and 4% had fibromyalgia-like symptoms.

“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 of 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,” said Dr. McLean in a press release.

While depression and post traumatic stress do play a role in chronic pain, this study reminds us that the physical symptoms of auto injuries are indeed real. Countless studies have documented the tissue damage, inflammation, and nervous system changes that can occur after whiplash injuries.

More work is needed to counter the stigma attached to auto injuries, and to demonstrate that earning proper compensation after an accident can assist patients in receiving the medical care needed to recover from chronic pain.

McLean SA, et al. Incidence and predictor of neck and widespread pain after motor vehicle collision among US litigants and nonlitigants. Pain 2014. 155(2): 309-321.

This publication is compliments of:

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How Long Does it Take to Recover From Whiplash?

One of the most common questions asked by anyone suffering from whiplash or another auto injury is, "How long do I need to recover?"

The answer to that question depends largely on the severity of the injury, as well as individual characteristics like age, mental health, and occupation. For instance one new study suggests that patients with grade I or II whiplash injury can expect to experience significant relief of their symptoms within a year of their injury. However, other research has shown that up to half of whiplash patients develop chronic problems.

To clarify the matter, researchers from France recently conducted a study of 173 patients with whiplash and 207 individuals with mild injuries. One year after the injury, 56% of whiplash patients still had not fully recovered, compared to 43% of more mild injury cases. The biggest factor in predicting poor quality of life was post-traumatic stress disorder. Earlier studies have also indicated the PTSD increases the likelihood that whiplash patients will suffer from chronic symptoms.

The term "chronic" typically refers to any painful symptoms that are experienced for longer than three months. Unfortunately, the lingering effects of chronic whiplash can last for up to a decade after the injury, according to previous research.

If your client is suffering from whiplash now, it's important that he or she be evaluated by a chiropractor or other spinal specialists who can assess the damage and grade of injury. Mild cases of whiplash may be resolved with a few chiropractic adjustments and at-home treatments, while more severe cases will require longer-term care. Seeking adequate treatment now will prevent chronic pain later.

Asenlöf P, et al. *The clinical course over the first year of Whiplash Associated Disorders (WAD): pain-related disability predicts outcome in a mildly affected sample. BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders 2013;14(1):361. doi: 10.1186/1471-2474-14-361.*

Hours M, et al. *One year after mild injury: comparison of health status and quality of life between patients with whiplash versus other injuries. Journal of Rheumatology 2013.*