Otitis externa: changing demographics and management challenges

Mr Hassan Mohammed FRCS (ORL-HNS), Mr Michael Mather (MRCS ENT), Prof. Janet Wilson FRCS(ORL-HNS), Freeman Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Background:
Otitis externa (OE) is an apparently simple condition, yet OE and its complications are among the commonest sources of urgent referrals to ENT. We aim to estimate changes over time in OE secondary care statistics and to explore GP trainee awareness of OE management

Materials and methods:
Primary care: FARSITE database was interrogated to obtain OE prevalence in North West England (population=152,238). A survey on OE management was distributed to GP trainees in the North East Deanery in England.
Secondary care: Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data in England were used to define the changing burden of OE in UK secondary care between 2002 and 2016. Number of patients presenting with OE to ENT casualty clinics in two UK hospitals was also recorded.

Results:
GP trainee survey: 64 GP trainees filled in the survey. 27 (42.%) reported that they use oral antibiotics for OE.
HES: Data showed an increase in patients admitted with OE while the number of patients admitted under ENT was stable over the time examined.

Discussion:
Annual prevalence of otitis externa was found to be 1.25% in the North West of England. The survey of GP trainees showed that the presence of OE guidelines does not translate to adherence. Secondly, despite GP trainees reporting following guidelines, this does not reduce their tendency to prescribe oral antibiotics, most commonly amoxicillin. Even GPs who did an ENT placement during their training had the same tendency. The increase in secondary care referrals for OE is disproportionate both to the reported prevalence of OE in community and to the number of ENT referrals to secondary care for other conditions. OE patients tend to need more than one appointment, which increases the pressure on casualty clinic and add to the significance of prophylactic measures and primary care management.

Conclusion:
OE is common and while prevalence appears to be stable, increased number of patients are referred and admitted to secondary care compared with previous years. – one in 4 urgent ENT clinic slots. Guidelines for management of AOE are available, however, adherence to these guidelines is low.

Prevalence of otitis externa in primary care in North West of England by age range

Inpatient episodes of otitis externa in secondary care in England by age range

Number of patients with otitis externa (OE) in casualty clinics (CAS) in two North East of England hospitals