

The Global Pain Index – an insightful survey worldwide

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GSK Consumer Healthcare unveiled the Southeast Asia's 2017 Global Pain Index (GPI) on 20th June 2017.



- 85% Singaporeans have suffered from head and body pain, with nearly half (42%) suffering weekly from body pain
- 1 in 2 suffer in silence, more commonly men (61%) than women (46%); one-third delay pain relief by weeks or even longer
- 6 in 10 parents believe that pain makes it harder for them to listen and help their children with everyday tasks
- Compared to the rest of the world, Singaporeans have amongst the lowest knowledge around pain relief medicines

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It is a unique global study that aims to examine people's attitude towards head and body pain, and also evaluate its resulting economic and societal impact. This event brought together leading experts in the field, for exploring and deliberating regional and local findings related to socio-economic impact of pain, including how it impacts economic output and performance, as well as personal life and parenting.

Panelists included *Dr. Yeo Sow Nam* (Director of The Pain Specialist, Mount Elizabeth Hospital), *Professor Eric Finkelstein* (Health Services Research Program, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School), *Dr Wong Li Lian* (Registered Pharmacist, Department of Pharmacy, NUS) and *Kelly Latimer* (Fitness enthusiast and new mum).

Study was commissioned by GSK Consumer Healthcare, an associate of GlaxoSmithKline plc. U.K., which is one of world's largest consumer healthcare companies. It was conducted by Edelman Intelligence, which surveyed 19,000 adults across 32 countries including Singapore.

Objective of the survey was to investigate the impact of body and head pain on all aspects of a sufferer's life, from workplace productivity to relationships with family and friends. It resulted in some interesting revelations, such as the fact that Southeast Asian countries have the highest population that suffers with everyday pain. It also brought to light shocking facts about how Singaporeans ignore, power through or delay treatment of their pain, and which then results in an avoidable cost to the economy (of approximately 2% of annual GDP) due to missed work days and reduced workplace productivity.

Heather Pelier, Southeast Asia Area Marketing Director for Pain Relief and Respiratory, GSK Consumer Healthcare opened the discussion by explaining how pain has impacted almost everyone, and can hamper a person's ability to live and work longer and lead a holistic life. She also added, "As a worldwide leader in pain relief, this drives us to better understand people's pain and be a part of the solution that helps reduce its social and economic impact on people across the world."

Professor Eric Finkelstein, an expert in the field, mentioned that everyday pain has significant emotional and economic impact on people's lives and economy. To illustrate his point, he shared some key statistics from this research, such as the finding that untreated or delayed pain related ailments result in financial costs to Singapore that are close to S\$8.4 billion, mostly in the form of annual productivity losses. Further, study also estimates similar costs for Southeast Asian economies to be close to USD 44.6 billion.

Surprisingly, for a nation of academic achievers, Singaporeans appear to have amongst the lowest levels of knowledge around medicines available for pain relief and treatment: including dosing (24%), potential risks (15%), side effects (15%), ingredients (11%) or interactions with other medicines (10%). Further, majority of people have been observed to be self-diagnosing the causes of their pain, and almost half of the times end up in treating their head or body pains with non-prescription pain relief options. This is particularly worrying, given that those who are self-diagnosing also have low levels of knowledge around medication and high usage of non-prescription drugs that they commonly use, which could be placing them at a health-related risks and complications in the future. However, good news is that 6 in 10 Singaporeans are interested in learning more about their medicines, given the right avenue and opportunity to educate themselves.

It was also highlighted that pain can affect relationships, and possibly result in a cascading effect that can go far beyond the person who is immediately experiencing pain; with implications such as hindered socializing, or even a lack of interest and ability to spend quality family time. Further, this condition tends to be more severe amongst people with younger kids because it can limit parents' ability to listen to, be patient and play with their children. Infact, survey revealed that 4 in 5 parents mentioned that they believe they can be better parents without the pain.

According to Dr Yeo Sow Nam, pain can be very disruptive, and beyond the individual sufferer in an immediate term, extending to nearly all aspects of their lives and people around. While headaches, body aches and migraines may not seem to have serious consequences, 2017 GSK Global Pain Index findings suggest that they can have a cumulative impact on a person's well-being, if not effectively managed. Despite availability of many suitable and effective options for treating pain, it is also particularly concerning that Singaporeans still tend to suffer in silence for longer periods than they should. This results in a huge burden at a national as well as individual level, especially for those who suffer from pain on a weekly basis. It is therefore important that people take effective steps to address their pain.

Expert panelists also broke some popular myths and provided a much-needed clarity around intake of medicine during pregnancy and even otherwise. There was also a lot of concern raised by consumers and journalists, related to the risk of addiction of pain management medicines. Doctors in the panel hinted that medical practitioners should perform drug screening to ensure non-usage of recreational drugs, before prescribing opioids. They however did point out that while some pain killers (like paracetamol) have no withdrawal symptoms when taken as directed in most healthy people, misuse of painkillers for an extended period, might result in withdrawal symptoms. People should also be wary and watchful of the shelf-life of the medicine. The panel emphasized on the need for better patient awareness, and reinforced the need for better education around pain treatment and management.

GSK Consumer Healthcare will continue to actively work with healthcare professionals and consumers, for ensuring that pain sufferers have access to clear, reliable information when it comes to choosing medicines as well as understanding dosage, reading labels and safe storage and proper disposal of medicines. Company also plans to launch Health at Home program, aimed at providing people with reliable and clear information about medicines. Specifically, objective of the program is multi-fold, such as to facilitate safety and effectiveness of treatment options by everyone, providing guidance on choosing right medicine, emphasizing the importance of reading labels, as well as ensuring various aspects of administration such as correct dosage, safe storage, and proper disposal of medicines.