Chinese Family Caregivers’ Perception on Opioids as Analgesic – Insights from CHIACPO Survey

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Background
Misconceptions about morphine and opioids as analgesic in cancer pain are thought to be common, however, prevalence among local Chinese was unknown.

Objectives
To study the prevalence of misconceptions about opioids among family caregivers of advanced cancer patients receiving palliative care and its correlation with caregivers’ characteristics.

Method
This was a single centre cross-sectional study. A 20-item questionnaire on the common misconceptions about opioid use was developed. Family caregivers were invited to join the study by convenience sampling. Consented caregivers provided their demographics and rated their agreement with the 20 items using a Likert scale from 1 (very disagree) to 5 (very agree). Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis and Chi Square test was used for comparison between groups.

Results
A total of 100 caregivers (median age 56 years old) completed the questionnaire, 60% were female and 77% were main caregivers. The 3 most common agreed/strongly agreed items (misconceptions) were:
• Morphine should be reserved for very severe pain only
• Morphine is only used in late but not early stage cancer patients
• Morphine has ceiling effect in pain control
The 3 most common disagreed/very disagreed items (least misconceptions) were:
• It is shameful to tell others that I am prescribed with morphine
• Morphine should not be given to patients even with doctor’s prescription
• Morphine should not be used because of the historical pain from Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars

In 14 out of 20 items, caregivers with misconceptions were significantly older. (all p<0.05)
Half or near half of the caregivers disagreed that morphine is associated with euthanasia (p=0.023) or hastening death (p=0.013), especially for main caregivers.
The caregivers’ answers were not correlated with the patients’ demographics.

Conclusions
Our study has identified that misconceptions about opioids are common especially among the older caregivers, more attention and education are required.