

WG 2 (Preventive Medicine and Healthcare Policies)

Timely Detection and Early Intervention of Chronic Pain Syndrome in Combat-Injured Soldiers: Insights from the "Iron Swords" War

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Background:

Chronic pain is usually defined as pain persisting for more than 3 months, following an acutely painful event, without an alternative identifiable cause. In patients who suffer from trauma events, chronic pain syndrome often occurs after orthopedic injuries and nerve damage. The Recovery and Rehabilitation Center of the Medical Corps was established during the "Iron Swords" war in order to provide multidisciplinary treatment to war trauma patients in the IDF.

Rational:

Early detection and prevention of patients at high risk of developing chronic pain syndromes may allow early intervention and prevention, thereby enhancing patients' quality of life, return to duty, and long-term outcomes. We aim to develop a predictive model that will provide early identification of patients at high risk of developing chronic pain syndrome among soldiers experiencing war trauma events.

Methods:

We will use data collected during the "Iron Swords" war, focusing on patients treated in the Recovery and Rehabilitation Center. We will assess the association of demographic and medical variables, as well as data collected during the trauma event, with the risk of developing chronic pain syndrome. The outcome of chronic pain syndrome will be defined using a list of diagnoses supported by decisions made by certificated medical boards.

Preliminary findings:

The Recovery and Rehabilitation Center has treated over 2,800 patients who experienced war-related trauma during the "Iron Swords" war, including approximately 1,000 with major orthopedic injuries. The majority received treatment for pain, and some have developed chronic pain syndrome.

Statement of importance:

Early detection of patients at high risk for chronic pain syndrome will allow early intervention, reducing the risk of long-term sequelae. In addition, it would lay the groundwork for follow-up studies that compare different interventions using real-world data or clinical trials.

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Were We Right to Enlist Patients with Controlled Celiac Disease to Combat Roles?

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Background:

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder triggered by gluten ingestion that affects approximately 1% of the population. Traditionally, individuals with celiac disease were deemed unsuitable for high-demand military roles due to their dietary restrictions and associated health risks. In 2014, a new Israel Defense Forces (IDF) policy allowed patients with serology-controlled celiac disease to be enlisted in combat positions.

Rationale:

This policy change has expanded the recruitment pool, fostering inclusivity and diversity. While the IDF has implemented adaptations such as allowances for gluten-free nutrition and a medical follow-up protocol, it remains unclear whether soldiers with celiac disease in combat roles were able to maintain adequate disease control.

Aim:

We aim to evaluate the association of enlisting soldiers with celiac disease to combat roles and the risk of disease control loss.

Methods:

We propose a historical prospective cohort study using the medical corps electronic health records, comparing combat soldiers diagnosed with celiac disease to their non-combat counterparts (2014-2024). The main outcome will be the incidence of loss of disease control, as measured using anti-transglutaminase antibodies (aTTG) IgA > 15U/ml in serum. We will also assess patients' compliance with laboratory follow-up as required every six months.

Preliminary findings:

During the study period, 4390 people with celiac disease were recruited, 810 (18.5%) of them to combat roles. The proportions of soldiers with celiac disease receiving a referral to aTTG test were 85.6% versus 80.8% among those in combat versus non-combat roles, respectively. The respective proportions of patients who performed aTTG tests during service were 77.0% (n=624) and 66.3% (n=2372).

Statement of Importance:

The policy change allowing individuals with celiac disease to serve in combat roles was implemented in 2014, but its impact on soldier's health has not been assessed. This study will provide data on the integration of soldiers with celiac disease in combat roles and lay the groundwork for the possible inclusion of additional populations currently exempt from service.