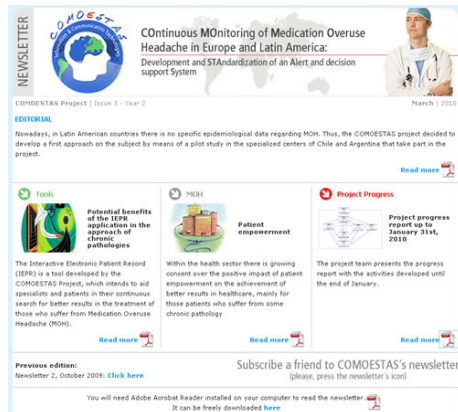




## COntinuous MOnitoring of Medication Overuse Headache in Europe and Latin America: Development and STAndardization of an Alert and decision support System



## Editorial



## Medication Overuse Headache: first data from Argentina and Chile \*

In our first newsletter we pointed out that the results of epidemiological studies developed in Europe and Asia indicated that the prevalence of chronic headache associated with medication abuse (MOH) implied between 1 and 1.4% of the global population, with a peak prevalence in women in their 50s.

In this age range, indeed, 5% of women met the diagnostic criteria for MOH.

Nowadays there are several studies in different Latin American countries on migraine and chronic headaches, but there is no specific data regarding MOH. Thus, the COMOESTAS project decided to develop a first approach on the subject by means of a pilot study in the specialized centers of Chile and Argentina that take part in the project.

### Pilot study in Buenos Aires

With the aim of assessing MOH impact in Argentina, between March and May, 2008, the FLENI (Fundación para la Lucha Contra las Enfermedades Neurológicas de la Infancia) Pain Clinic interviewed 100 patients presenting with headache for the first time. In order to carry out this study, the medical professionals in charge used a standardized questionnaire and the International Headache Society (IHS) classification criteria, which allow diagnosing primary headaches and MOH.

### Sampling and results

The group of patients presenting with headache mainly consisted of women (84%) with a high level of education (68% of them had a university degree). The data analysis demonstrated that 74% of the interviewed patients presented MOH, within an age range of 20 to 72 years.

Among them, only 34% had had a medical consultation during the previous year; 23% of whom received preventative treatment.



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These surveys also revealed that patients with MOH had experienced the following primary headache disorders:

- Migraine without aura (46.88%)
- Tension type headache (14.06%)
- Combination of both types of headache (39.06%)

Besides, at the time of the consultation 47.3% of them suffered from insomnia, and 75% of them reported high levels of anxiety. 60.81% also suffered from cervical pain and 45.94% suffered from pain in the temporomandibular joint region.

Within these patients, the headache chronification average was 4.54 years (with an average of 24 months), while medication overuse averaged 3.79 years (with an average of 24 months).

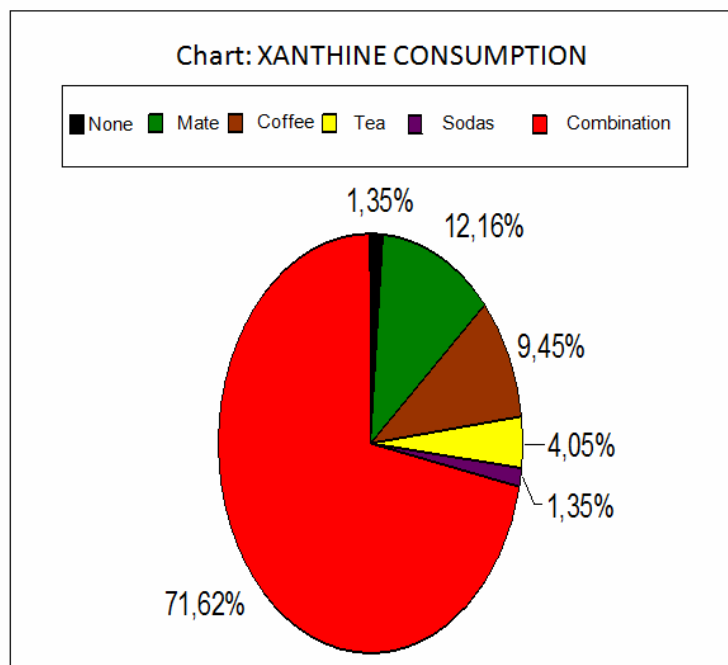
As for the type of medication used, it was found that 40.54% of the patients overused different types of drugs (NSAIDs, caffeine, ergotamine); 36.49% of them overused combined ergotamine; 20.27%, simple analgesics, and only 2.7% of them, triptans. Noteworthy, Argentina is one of the Latin American countries where the population can acquire ergotamine combined with other drugs (caffeine, ibuprofen, analgesics and/or antiemetics) and NSAIDs without any medical prescription. On the contrary, opioids are not legally available without medical prescription, whilst triptans are sold for a much higher price.

When it comes to habits, 85.71% of smokers and 79.16% of patients who had moderate alcohol consumption met the criteria for MOH. Besides, 71.62% of the interviewed patients consumed different types of beverages containing xanthines, as shown in the following graph:



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### Pilot Study in Santiago de Chile

Along the same period, (March to May, 2008), 91 patients presenting with headache at the Red de Salud de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Healthcare Network of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) were evaluated by means of a simple survey in order to assess MOH impact. Diagnoses were also made based upon the HIS classification.

### Results

The group of patients studied, in an age range of 35 to 69, consisted mainly of women (79.12%), of whom, 64.83% had presented headache 15 days a month for the last three months. Among the patients interviewed, 66% (39 patients) met the criteria for MOH. 44% of women and 37% of men who consulted this general neurology unit presented a headache pattern compatible with the diagnosis of MOH.

The patients were grouped, according to the type of primary headache, into:

- Migraine (73.63%)
- Tension type headache (12.09%)



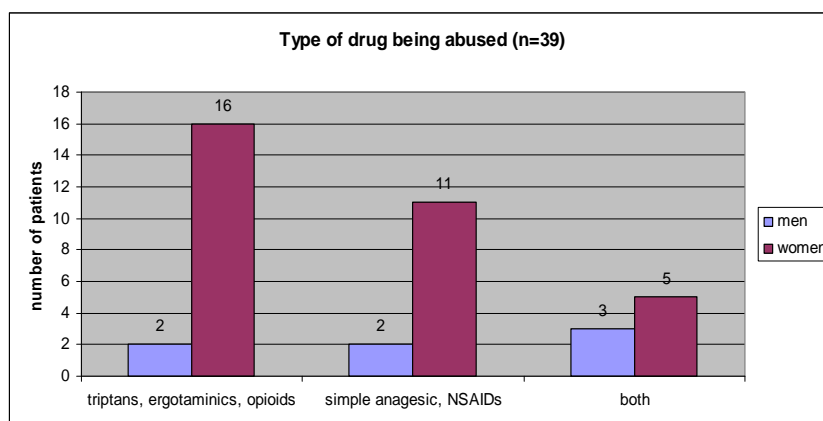
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- Combination of both types of headache (14.28%)

As shown in the following graphic, 46.15% of the 39 patients with chronic headache and probable MOH overused complex drugs (triptans, ergotaminics or opioids); 33.3% of them, NSAIDs and simple analgesics, and 20.51%, both types.



### Conclusion

These first notes show the high incidence of symptomatic drugs overuse among patients presenting with headache who consulted the neurological centers where these studies were carried out.

Unlike Europe and the United States, there is a higher prevalence of overuse of drugs or combinations containing ergotamine, due to the fact, probably, that they are available over the counter in both countries, and due to the relative higher cost of triptans.

The gathered results show the need for information and education increase on the risks of self medication, both for patients and the general population.

\*The data presented herein constitute an advance of the first conclusions drawn from the reports elaborated within the frame of the COMOESTAS Project by J.A. Leston, M.T. Goicochea, F. Salvat, L. Bonamico, D. Cherquetti (Instituto FLENI) and R. Fadic, B. Shand, R. Valenzuela, E. Vergara and C. Cabib (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile).