

LIMBIC-CENC Clinical Care Monographs: **TBI, Pain and Opioid Therapy**

Key Finding: LIMBIC-CENC analysis of TBI evaluations in the VA healthcare system showed that chronic pain and chronic pain disability were associated with TBI, PTSD and depression.¹ Opioid prescribing patterns for pain management did not appear to differ substantially for Veterans with or without TBI. About 20% with TBI and pain received short-term opioid therapy, while 3% received long-term opioid therapy. About 90% of Veterans with TBI treated with long-term opioid therapy had moderate to extreme levels of pain, PTSD symptoms, and sleep disturbance; 80% received at least one non-opioid therapy first.

Perspective: Chronic pain symptoms co-occur with TBI and other disorders that make successful treatment challenging. While clinical guidelines recommend against prescribing opioids to Veterans with a history of TBI, opioid prescribing patterns do not differ between those with or without TBI. Of note however, only 3% of Veterans with TBI were treated with long-term opioids. Prospective longitudinal studies of the interplay between pain, TBI, and treatment approaches are needed.

Clinical Pearls:

- When disabling chronic pain in Servicemembers and Veterans with TBI is identified, clinicians should emphasize nonopioid treatments and use a person-centered care model.
- Opioid therapy should only be used under evidence-based guidelines.

References:

1. Seal KH, Bertenthal D, Barnes DE, Byers AL, Strigo I, Yaffe K: *Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium Study Group. Association of Traumatic Brain Injury With Chronic Pain in Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans: Effect of Comorbid Mental Health Conditions. Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2017 Aug;98(8):1636-1645. doi: 10.1016/j.apmr.2017.03.026. Epub 2017 Apr 25. PMID: 28455190*

n.b.: The 'Perspectives' and 'Clinical Pearls' expressed are based on interpretation of findings from the described Long-term Impact of Military-related Brain Injury Consortium/Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (LIMBIC-CENC) research studies and their assimilation with the extant literature. These views are endorsed by LIMBIC-CENC leadership but may vary across individual researchers. All findings involve Service Members (SMs), Veterans (Vs) or both.

LIMBIC-CENC research and its KT products were supported financially and is based upon work supported by the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command and from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium under Award No. W81XWH-13-2-0095, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Long-term Impact of Military-related Brain Injury Consortium/Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium under Award No. 1I01CX002097-01, the U.S. Department of Defense Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC) Award W81XWH-13-2-0095 and the U.S. Department of Defense Long-term Impact of Military-relevant Brain injury Consortium Award No. W81XWH-18-PH/TBIRP-LIMBIC. The U.S. Army Medical Research Acquisition Activity, 820 Chandler Street, Fort Detrick MD 21702-5014 is the awarding and administering acquisition office. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Government, or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and no official endorsement should be inferred.