



Breakthrough Cancer Pain Survey Fact Sheet

Breakthrough Cancer Pain is One of the Most Challenging Aspects of Having Cancer—Negatively Impacting Quality of Life and Causing Financial Hardships

What is Breakthrough Cancer Pain (BTCP)?

While there is no universally accepted definition of breakthrough cancer pain, survey respondents were presented with the following definition of breakthrough cancer pain:

“Sudden, temporary flares of severe pain that occur even when pain medication is used. Breakthrough pain can occur spontaneously or in relation to a specific activity.”¹

Breakthrough Cancer Pain Impacts Quality of Life:

Those who experienced breakthrough cancer pain reported a negative impact on their quality of life:

- 75 percent said BTCP is one of the most challenging aspects of having cancer
- 89 percent stated BTCP negatively affects the quality of their lives
- 82 percent responded BTCP has caused hardships in their lives
- 91 percent believe their quality of life would improve if they could get BTCP under control

How Breakthrough Cancer Pain is Impacting Quality of Life:

Breakthrough cancer pain affects many spheres of an individual’s life, including their physical health, emotional health, interpersonal relationships, and ability to engage in certain activities:

- Nearly three in four or 73 percent said BTCP wakes them from a deep sleep at least once a month
- Nearly half or 48 percent said BTCP interrupts their sleep weekly
- 82 percent said BTCP negatively affects their emotional health
- 55 percent said BTCP affects their relationships with their family members
- 76 percent reported BTCP affects their ability to perform everyday household chores
- 83 percent indicated BTCP affects their desire to participate in certain activities

¹ National Cancer Institute, Dictionary of Cancer Terms, Accessed online on January 2010:
<http://nci.nih.gov/dictionary/?CdrID=45612>

Breakthrough Cancer Pain Impacts Medical Treatment:

In addition to their quality of life, those who experienced breakthrough cancer pain believe this type of pain is affecting their medical treatment:

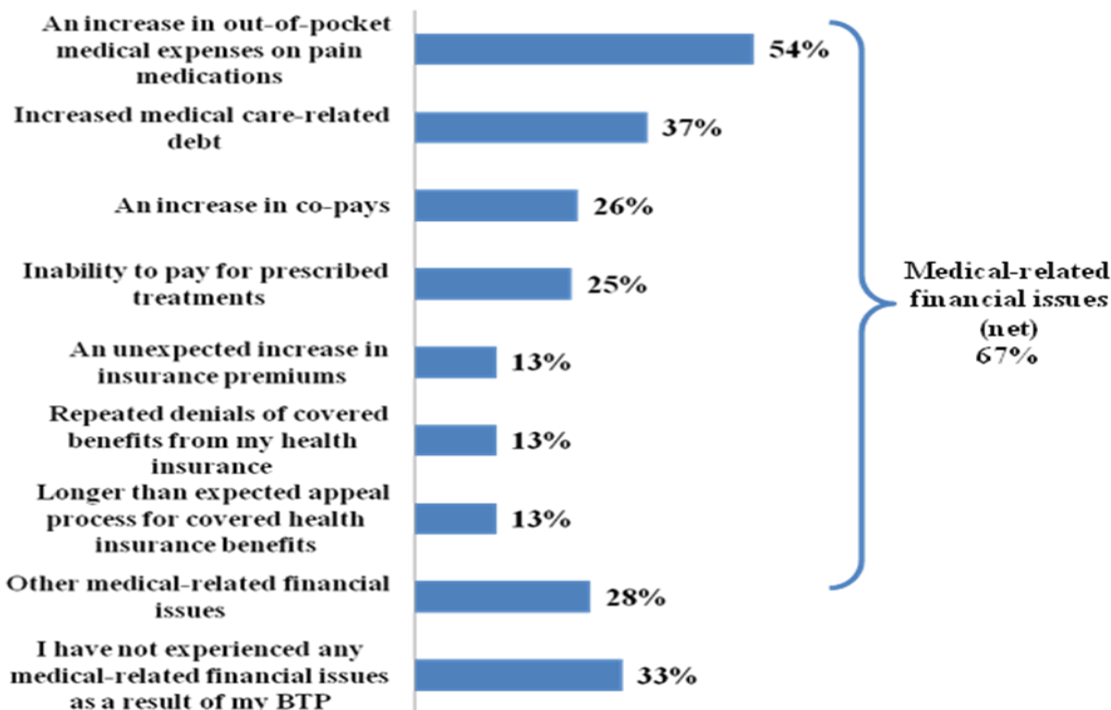
- 87 percent said BTCP has affected their medical treatment somehow
- 66 percent are taking more medication
- 51 percent visit their healthcare provider more often
- 18 percent have been hospitalized more often due to BTCP
- 14 percent visit the ER more often

Breakthrough Cancer Pain Impacts Medical Costs:

The majority of those who experienced breakthrough cancer pain are experiencing financial hardships:

- 73 percent reported that BTCP has increased their daily medical expenses
- About two in three or 67 percent said they have experienced medical-related financial issues as a result of the BTCP
- More than half (54 percent) saw an increase in their out-of-pocket medical expenses on pain medications
- More than one in three (37 percent) have increased medical care-related debt
- 25 percent are unable to pay for prescribed treatments

Impact of Breakthrough Pain on Medical Cost



Frequency of Breakthrough Cancer Pain:

Those who experienced breakthrough cancer pain experience severe, frequent and unpredictable pain that occurs suddenly and reaches peak severity quickly:

- 96 percent experience BTCP at least once a month
- About seven in 10 (71 percent) experience BTCP at least once a week
- 22 percent experience BTCP several times a day or more
- 74 percent said their BTCP typically occurs unexpectedly or without warning

Intensity of Breakthrough Cancer Pain:

On a scale of 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain imaginable), those who experienced breakthrough cancer pain, on average rated their pain as severe (7.4 average):

- More than half (53 percent) rated their pain an eight, nine, or 10
- 13 percent rated their pain a nine
- 11 percent rated their pain a 10

Patient-Physician Communication about Breakthrough Cancer Pain:

The vast majority of those who are currently seeing a healthcare provider for their cancer or cancer pain have discussed this pain with their treating physician regarding its treatment and impact on quality of their life:

- Ninety-five percent have discussed BTCP at some point with various healthcare professionals
- About half (53 percent) typically discuss available treatment options
 - Two in three or 66 percent discuss various aspects of BTCP's impact on quality of life, including fifty-five percent who discuss the effect of BTCP on the sufferer's ability to perform everyday household activities
- About half (52 percent) said their healthcare provider has described BTCP as a normal side effect of cancer or its treatment

Additional background on Breakthrough Cancer Pain:

Abrupt episodes of pain can result from a variety of causes: acute, recurrent pain from untreated or undertreated pain, pain flares due to certain activities or events, or breakthrough pain that emerges in spite of ongoing pain medication treatment (whether someone is taking long-action opioids vs. pain medication on a regular basis). No matter the type, pain that breaks through is problematic; it requires focused assessment and treatment.

Research suggests that BTCP is common with one-half to two-thirds of people with cancer-related pain reporting regular and recurrent episodes.² Breakthrough cancer pain is different from other cancer pain. Most people with cancer will experience pain at some point, and more than half of patients with advanced cancer report moderate to severe steady pain, also known as background pain. This type of persistent pain

² Portenoy RK, Hagen NA. Breakthrough pain: definition, prevalence and characteristics. *Pain*. 1990;41: 273-281.

can usually be managed with prescription opioid medications. Breakthrough cancer pain; however, is pain occurring even when a patient's background pain is under control.

About the Survey:

The American Pain Foundation (APF) commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a survey among adults who have been diagnosed with cancer, are currently living with cancer-related pain, are taking medication to manage the pain, and experience sudden, temporary flares. A variety of cancer types were represented in the survey. The top five most listed cancer diagnoses were breast cancer (36 percent), prostate cancer (9 percent), colorectal cancer (9 percent), non-melanoma skin cancer (7 percent), and bone cancer (7 percent). The survey was conducted online between October 2 and 27, 2009. All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal. The sampling error for the total sample of 545 adults age 18 and older residing in the United States is +/- 4.2 percentage points. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Tina Register at tregister@painfoundation.org.

About the American Pain Foundation

Founded in 1997, the American Pain Foundation is an independent nonprofit 501(C)3 organization serving people with pain through information, advocacy, and support. APF's mission is to improve the quality of life of people in pain by raising public awareness, providing practical information, promoting research, and advocating to remove barriers and increase public access to effective pain management. To learn more about APF, visit www.painfoundation.org

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