

REVIEW

Initial approach to the patient with abdominal pain

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Abstract

Abdominal pain is one of the most common symptoms for which patients present to the hospital. The causes of abdominal pain are diverse, so the diagnosis management often involves a multidisciplinary team. The initial evaluation of patients with abdominal pain must focus on excluding conditions that may endanger the patient's life in short time. The prognosis of patients complaining of abdominal pain proved to be different depending on age. Despite the progress registered in the field of imaging and molecular investigations in recent years, in a significant percentage of patients who present with abdominal pain, the cause is not identified.

Keywords: *abdominal pain, etiology, diagnosis, prognosis.*

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Introduction

Worldwide, an increase in the demand for emergency medical services has been observed [1]. Among the reasons suggested for this phenomenon are ageing of the population, the increase in health awareness and socio-demographic factors [2,3].

Abdominal pain is one of the most frequent symptoms that determine the patients to present to the emergency department [4]. This symptom is encountered in approximately 5-10% of emergency departments visits [5,6]. In the United States, in 2006, of the 119 million presentations in emergency departments, 8 million presentations (7%) were for abdominal pain [6]. In Western Sweden, for the year 2020, 48,311 ambulance missions were reported and in 1,747 cases the reason

for the request was represented by abdominal pain [3]. Despite the progress made in the diagnosis management of abdominal pain, in approximately 25% of patients receiving medical care in emergency departments and in 35-41% of hospitalized patients no specific cause for abdominal pain is identified [7,8]. In approximately 80% of patients discharged with the diagnosis of undifferentiated abdominal pain, this symptom resolves within 2 weeks of presentation [8].

Abdominal pain is associated with a different prognosis depending on age. Thus, older patients presenting to emergency departments with abdominal pain have a 6-8 times higher mortality rate compared to younger patients presenting for the same symptom [9,10]. 20% of adults who presented