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Abstract

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The overall aim of this thesis was to describe subjects with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) from different perspectives. Focus was on patients at the time of diagnosis, impact of the disease in comparison to other chronic diseases, factors associated with good health and quality of life (QoL), and diagnostic spirometry in clinical practice.

Methods: Qualitative method, grounded theory, was used to analyse patients' perspectives at the time of diagnosis in a primary care setting (n=10). Public health surveys in the general population were used to compare chronic diseases (n=10,755) and analyse factors associated with health outcomes in COPD (n=1,475). Medical records and spirometry reports, from primary and secondary care, were analysed to assess diagnosis of COPD in clinical practice (n=533).

Results: In clinical practice, 70% of patients at the time of diagnosis of COPD lacked spirometry results confirming the diagnosis. Factors related to consequences of smoking, shame and restrictions in physical activity (PA) in particular, were described by patients at the time of diagnosis of COPD. In general subjects with COPD (84%), rheumatoid arthritis (74%) and diabetes mellitus (72%) had an activity level considered too low to maintain good health. In COPD, the most important factor associated with good health and quality of life was a high level of PA. Odds ratios (OR (95%CI)) varied from 1.90 (1.47-2.44) to 7.57 (4.57-12.55) depending on the degree of PA, where subjects with the highest PA level had the best health and QoL.

Conclusions: Subjects with COPD need to be diagnosed at an early stage, and health professionals should be aware that feelings of shame could delay patients from seeking care and thus obtaining a diagnosis. The use of spirometry and the diagnostic quality should be emphasised. In patients with COPD greater attention should be directed on increasing the physical activity level, as patients with a low level of physical activity display worse health and quality of life.

Keywords: chronic disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes mellitus, diagnosis, health status, spirometry, physical activity, public health survey, qualitative method, quality of life, rheumatoid arthritis.

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