



Development and organization of a nation-wide headache treatment network in Germany

Göbel Hartmut, Heinze Axel, Heinze-Kuhn Katja, Petersen Inga, Nielson Anneke, Kiel Headache Centre, Kiel, Germany, www.schmerzlinik.de kiel@schmerzlinik.de

Aims: The traditional treatment of headache patients involves care in separate sectors of the healthcare system. Many sufferers with chronic headache, frustrated with this lack of efficiency, look for alternative treatments outside of the professional system. In the long-term, headache disorders are thereby maintained and aggravated. Severe organ complications then bring patients back to medical care. This results in a marked individual burden as well as very high direct and indirect costs to society.

Methods: Contrasting with the traditional model, a nationwide treatment network of medical specialists in both outpatient centres and hospitals was developed in Germany for the specialized treatment and coordinated care of headache disorders. The participating therapists treat according to current scientific guidelines. Outpatient, rehabilitation and inpatient therapy are harmonized and tightly coordinated. Patients are actively involved through information, education and self-help group.

Results: Across Germany, more than 452 regional pain therapists in outpatient centres and hospitals collaborate as part of a national treatment network. Local doctors can be found on the network's website. The network is used widely and increasingly. At present, almost all large German statutory health insurers participate in this treatment project. The cost effectiveness has been confirmed through analysis of direct and indirect costs.

Conclusion: The development of this coordinated headache treatment network in Germany has progressed very successfully and is heavily utilized. With its introduction, the national landscape for specialized headache treatment has changed markedly. This confirms the innovation potential and effectiveness of modern headache care.

Correspondence:
Prof. Dr. Hartmut Göbel, Kiel Headache Centre
Heikendorfer Weg 9-27, D-24149 Kiel Email:
hg@schmerzlinik.de Internet: www.schmerzlinik.de
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Traditional treatment



Every year, everyone in Germany takes an average of 37 doses of pain medication



8.3 million Germans take on average one tablet per day for their headache



58,853 single doses of triptans are taken on an average day in Germany



Diagnosis and therapy are not coordinated and split across healthcare sectors

Coordinated integrated national treatment network



Phase I

- Local treatment by nationwide treatment network of headache experts in outpatient centres
- Specialised diagnosis made
- Professional screening
- Selection of treatment paths



Phase II

- Intensive treatment
- Interdisciplinary and multimodal
- Across sectors
- Integration of neurology and behavioural medicine etc.



Phase III

- Local monitoring at place of residence
- Success control
- Adaptation, Education
- E-Health, tele medicine