

Local study shows annual productivity costs lost due to migraine disability could be as high as Php41,000 per person

Oct 30, 2020

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Migraine is a type of headache disorder characterized by recurrent attacks of moderate to severe head pain that is typically throbbing, often on one side of the head and associated with nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and sound. Around 12 million Filipinos suffer from migraine, according to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016.² Migraine often occurs during peak productive years, between the ages of 35 and 45 and often results in temporary disability during attacks. Affected people can be incapacitated by the symptoms which can last for days. Migraine is estimated to cost up to €27 billion in Europe and around \$20 billion in the US annually, including indirect costs such as lost productivity.³

Researchers conducted a survey among employees of 12 companies in the Philippines across various industries, such as telecommunications, holdings groups, business process outsourcing, and finance. A total of 954 employees participated in the survey, which was conducted online and through physical booths at company clinics from February to May 2020. Fifty-four percent or 511 screened positive for migraine, with 193 (38%) reporting they were diagnosed by a licensed medical professional and the rest screening positive using the ID Migraine™ Test.

Of those who screened positive with the ID Migraine™ Test, 270 (84.9%) reported experiencing nausea, 282 (88.7%) reported that migraine headaches limited their ability to do daily tasks, and 284 (89.3%) reported that light bothered them when they had migraine headaches. More than half (55%) reported experiencing moderate to severe migraine headaches. Women comprised two-thirds (67%) of all positive migraine screens and were more likely to have high migraine disability. Those with high migraine disability scored lower on role limitations due to poor emotional and physical health compared to those with low migraine disability. Quality of

life was significantly lower among those with high migraine disability than those with low migraine disability.

Stress and looking at computer screens were cited as the top trigger for migraine, while sleeping enough hours and getting a massage were cited as top coping mechanisms. Three in four (77%) visited their company clinic within the past 3 months, which meant that most employees with migraine-related symptoms consulted general practitioners. Five in six (85%) took medication for migraine, almost all of which were over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

Researchers noted that there are local companies that try to provide ample support for medical consultations through their employee benefits programs. “[However], there are opportunities to implement other interventions such as prevention and wellness programs such as setting up dark rooms in offices, and providing educational materials and education tools to monitor migraine. Most medications taken for migraine remain OTC medicines for symptom relief, and further research is needed to gauge willingness of employers to pay for preventive medication for migraine.”

“This study is important as it provides local data on the burden of migraine among Filipino workers, as well as highlights the need to implement workplace wellness programs and explore new preventive and treatment options for migraine,” said Dr. Rosalina E. Picar, President, Philippine Neurological Association.

“A social media analysis done by Novartis found that the stress and anxiety induced by the COVID-19 pandemic have triggered migraine attacks in patients all over the world.⁴ We hope that the results of the study can help inform employers and health care professionals in crafting workplace disease prevention programs and enhancing migraine care, especially during these challenging times,” said Mr. Jugo Tsumura, President and Managing Director, Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

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