

Consider IC in Patients with Chronic Pelvic Pain

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When a patient presents with unexplained urinary urgency and frequency and chronic pelvic pain, yet urine cultures are negative, ob-gyns should consider interstitial cystitis as a potential cause, according to the Interstitial Cystitis Association.

“Finding out if the patient has IC as soon as possible, rather than delaying the diagnosis is ideal,” said ACOG Fellow Fred M. Howard Jr., MD, and ICA advisory board member. “Ob-gyns should be sure to document the absence of infection with negative urine cultures if a patient has recurrent symptoms suggesting recurrent acute cystitis. For example, if the patient has symptoms of acute cystitis more than two times in two months with no bacteria on urine cultures, then IC may be present.”

Ninety percent of those suffering from interstitial cystitis, a chronic inflammatory condition of the bladder, are women—a quarter of whom are younger than 30, according to the Interstitial Cystitis Association. The condition affects more than 1 million people in the US, but advocates believe this number is underestimated because many patients are misdiagnosed or undiagnosed.

Of patients referred to Dr. Howard for chronic pelvic pain, about one-third have IC. Of those, 75% have been managed effectively in his practice, he said. The other 25% were referred to a urologist.

According to Vicki Ratner, MD, ICA founder, president and chief medical staff officer, pelvic pain from IC can be so severe that it interferes with nearly every aspect of patient’s life. Patients may also develop vulvodynia, fibromyalgia, and irritable bowel syndrome.

“Pain is a critical part of the disease to treat,” she said. “Ob-gyns can collaborate with urologists and pain specialists to provide maximum benefit to their patients with IC.”

The ICA encourages ob0gyns who are interested in learning more about IC and treatment patients with IC to become part of the organization’s physician registry and to join the referral list for patients. The ICA also provides free doctor packets upon request by phone. Patient and physician information is available n the ICA website, www.ichelp.org.