OVERVIEW

In Panama, the fracture predictions over the next 10 years are unknown. Researchers have attempted to determine the percentage of annual fractures due to osteoporosis, but have not been able to complete their studies for a variety of reasons, including economic constraint. Osteoporosis is not a health priority in Panama. The authorities are aware of the problem of osteoporosis, as they attend events hosted by national osteoporosis societies in Panama. However, public hospitals currently have no densitometers or medical treatment other than calcium and vitamin D.

Osteoporosis treatment guidelines do not exist, and there is serious lack of epidemiological data and resources needed to support them. There is a great need for sponsorship of epidemiological studies. COPOS (Panama Council of Osteoporosis) has been educating the public for over 17 years. There is good collaboration among heterogeneous and multidisciplinary groups of specialists within the society.

In 2011, COPOS organized its sixth national congress on osteoporosis, where 325 physicians from varying specialties attended the meeting. The council also held six lectures throughout the year. During World Osteoporosis Day, COPOS organized several activities including press conferences, lectures in public and private hospitals, and a keynote lecture entitled “New techniques to evaluate bone quality”. The council members also participated in a television programme and conferences at four civil organizations.

KEY FINDINGS

Population growth statistics

The present population of Panama is estimated to be 3.5 million, of which 19% (654 000) is 50 years of age and older and 4.6% (160 000) is 70 years and over. By 2050, it is estimated that the total population will rise to 4.8 million, of which 36% (1.7 million) will be 50 years and older and 13% (651 000) will be 70 years and older (fig 1).

Epidemiology

There is a dearth of epidemiological data for osteoporosis in Panama. In one small study, published in 2000, bone density studies were performed on 1031 women in Panama. Of these women, 821 (79.6%) were found to be osteopenic or osteoporotic.

Hip fracture

One small study completed in 1994 found that 318 women had a hip fracture that year. The majority of the fractures occurred in postmenopausal women. Therefore a hip fracture rate of 191 for every 100 000 women 50 years of age and older was derived from this study.

Data from one study completed in 2004 listed the direct cost of hip fracture in Panama at 6000 USD.

Vertebral fracture, other fragility fractures

No available information.
Diagnosis

There are 17 DXA machines in Panama. This would allow for approximately one DXA machine for every 200,000 inhabitants. Public hospitals do not have DXA machines. The cost of bone densitometry testing ranges from 50 to 125 USD depending on whether or not the machine used is capable of performing a vertebral fracture assessment (VFA).

Reimbursement policy

No available Information.

Calcium and vitamin D

Calcium, vitamin D supplements, and fortified foods are available in Panama. A study, completed in 2008, showed that adolescents in Panama are not consuming adequate amounts of calcium. The average calcium consumption was found to be 377 mg/d which is less than 50% of the recommended calcium intake determined by the American Academy of Paediatrics. They were also found to have a high intake of carbonated beverages which may also negatively affect their future bone health.

Prevention, Education, Level of Awareness

Osteoporosis is not recognized as a major health problem and there are currently no government public awareness programmes covering prevention, diagnosis or management of osteoporosis. Physician guidelines do not exist. There is no governmental health professional training and currently there are no approved governmental guidelines for osteoporosis treatment or prevention.

Patient support groups do exist in Panama. Public health awareness programmes are supported via public lectures. Programmes in lifestyle prevention for osteoporosis are organized by the Panama Osteoporosis Council.

In general, level of awareness about osteoporosis is low in Panama. Physicians and allied health professionals are poorly equipped to care for patients with osteoporosis.

Recommendations

- Epidemiological studies need to be funded and completed to evaluate the state of osteoporosis in Panama.
- More DXA machines are needed, especially within public institutions.
- Training programmes, specializing in the detection (especially VFA), prevention and treatment of osteoporosis for physicians and allied health professionals, need to be developed.

References

1. U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base 2011
5. Kanis JA, Data on file 2011