URUGUAY

OVERVIEW

Uruguay has the largest proportion of seniors in Latin America. Osteoporosis is one of the more frequent chronic pathologies in adults; therefore the focus of government and policy makers should be to try and identify people at risk of fragility fractures after the age of 50 years.

The Uruguayan Society of Osteoporosis and Mineral Metabolism (SUOMM) utilizes guidelines according to the IOF and ISCD consensus in their work with the public and with physicians. The association is active in preparing conferences and special information material to facilitate understanding of this limiting, deforming and painful disease.

SUOMM holds preventative ultrasound campaigns, organizes activities each year for World Osteoporosis Day, participates in television programmes, lectures on the use of DXA in diagnosing osteoporosis, promotes weight-bearing exercise, and educates the public about the importance of sufficient vitamin D intake as well as a balanced diet rich in calcium and proteins.

Currently, there are no government guidelines or education materials for osteoporosis and no financial assistance. SUOMM’s goals are to reduce the patient’s fracture risk, ensure independence later in life, and to show support for people with osteoporosis.

KEY FINDINGS

Population growth statistics

The present population of Uruguay is estimated to be 3.3 million, of which 29% (960 000) is 50 years of age and older and 9.8% (325 000) is 70 years and over. By 2050, it is estimated that the total population will rise to 3.5 million, of which 41% (1 436 000) will be 50 years and older and 16% (567 000) will be 70 years and older (fig 1).

Epidemiology

No available information.

Hip fracture

It is estimated, from public and private hospital data, that there were 994 hip fractures in 2009. The SUOMM predicts that these numbers will increase by 30% by the year 2020 and by up to 90% in the year 2050. Approximately 85 - 90% of hip fractures are treated surgically. The indirect hospital cost for treating a hip fracture is estimated at 5000 USD. Sixty per cent of hip fracture patients go to nursing homes, and it is estimated that for each hip fracture, three months of productivity are lost in the workplace. The average hospital bed stay for a hip fracture patient is 10 - 12 days. According to SUOMM, this length of stay is significantly longer than for other major diseases including breast cancer, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer, heart disease and pulmonary disease.

Vertebral fracture, other fragility fractures

No information is available regarding the prevalence of vertebral fractures in Uruguay. According to the national society, a review of patient histories revealed that 90% of reported spine fractures are treated by a physician.
Diagnosis

In Uruguay, there are an estimated 10 DXA machines, allowing for one DXA per 330,000 inhabitants. There is one ultrasound scanner per 400,000 inhabitants. The average length of wait for a DXA scan or ultrasound scan is one week.

Reimbursement policy

The cost of a DXA scan is 50 USD. The cost of an ultrasound scan is 5 USD. These diagnostics tests are not reimbursed by the government health plan, but are reimbursed by private health care insurance.

SUOMM indicates that some osteoporosis medications are covered by both public and private insurance companies. Reimbursement details are not available.

Calcium and vitamin D

Calcium, vitamin D supplements, and fortified foods are available in Uruguay.

PREVENTION, EDUCATION, LEVEL OF AWARENESS

In Uruguay, 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 are no governmental health professional training programmes and are currently no approved governmental guidelines for osteoporosis treatment or prevention.

Patient support groups do exist in Uruguay. Public health awareness programmes are supported via websites, TV advertisements and televised health programmes.

The level of awareness among health professionals and the public has not been measured. The SUOMM reports that rheumatologists, endocrinologists, nutritionists and physiotherapists are the most well equipped and appropriately trained in caring for patients with osteoporosis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• SUOMM recommends that a DXA scan be included with other investigations such as cervical smear and mammography in the yearly exam for patients. Patients should be excused from work to have the exams and they should be free of cost.

• More population based epidemiological studies are needed to examine the osteoporosis and fracture incidence in Uruguay.

• Campaigns are needed to alert citizens to initiate prevention. Uruguayans need to determine their bone quality via a bone density scan.

• Osteoporosis treatment and prevention guidelines are needed in order to be able to better educate medical professionals.

• Osteoporosis should be recognized by the government as a major health problem.

REFERENCES