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40% of adolescents with patellofemoral pain do not seek medical care

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Background and Aim: A large proportion of adolescents suffering from patellofemoral pain (PFP) does not receive treatment for their knee pain. It is unclear if this is because they do not seek medical care or if they are not offered treatment after seeking medical care. The purpose of this study was to investigate the care-seeking behaviour among adolescents currently suffering from PFP.

Method: A retrospective investigation of the care-seeking behaviour among 121 adolescents with PFP enrolled in a randomized controlled trial was conducted. A questionnaire was sent to each adolescent's general practitioner (GP). The questionnaire included questions on the dates for consultations regarding knee pain, potential diagnoses, if treatment was initiated and if the adolescent was referred for further investigations.

Results: 60/95 of the adolescents had consulted their GP about their knee pain and the median number of contacts was 1.5 (range 1-7). The GPs initiated treatment in 48 out of the 60 adolescents who consulted their GP. The most common treatment used by the GP was information and advice (36/48) followed by pain medication (6/48). 26/60 of the adolescents who consulted their GP were at some stage referred, most commonly to physiotherapy followed by the departments of rheumatology and orthopaedics.

Conclusions: Among the 95 adolescents currently suffering from PFP only 60 had previously consulted their GP because of knee pain. There was a large heterogeneity in the treatments initiated by the GP. Most adolescents were given advice and information, which seems to have been unsuccessful as the adolescents still reported knee pain years after. These findings demonstrate the need for initiatives to ensure better treatment of adolescent PFP. As a first step, these initiatives should aim at establishing clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of adolescent PFP.