

Study Finds High Rate of ER Visits After Chiari Surgery Discharge

A study from Johns Hopkins has found a startling high rate of emergency room visits by Chiari patients within 30 days of decompression surgery. The researchers looked at 175 adult surgical patients treated by a single surgeon and found that 25% went to the ER at least once within 30 days of being discharged. The most common reason cited was extreme headaches which accounted for 41% of the visits. Other common reasons included aseptic meningitis, superficial wound infection, heart concerns, CSF leaks, and narcotic side effects. Three patients had to undergo additional surgery for issues such as deep wound infection and a suture leak. According to the authors, the 25% rate is much higher than is seen with many other types of surgeries. As an example, they cite a large bariatric surgery study which found 11% of patients went to the ER within 30 days of surgery. They also included studies which showed the Chiari rate is higher than published rates for other head and neck procedures, breast cancer surgery, invasive thoracic surgery, some heart procedures, and hip and knee replacements. The researchers also used the Chicago Chiari Outcome Scale (CCOS) to compare the outcomes of patients who went to the ER versus those who didn't. They found that those patients who went to the ER had significantly lower CCOS scores than those who didn't. The lower scores were independent of age, sex, BMI, and severity of herniation and syrinxes. The authors do not have an explanation for their findings and stress that they counseled patients prior to discharge that recovery would be difficult and encouraged everyone to follow the agreed upon pain management, which included both muscle relaxants and narcotics. While this number is troubling high, it is important to keep in mind that this is just one facility and that data from other institutions should be reviewed before drawing any conclusions.

Source: Feghali J, Marinaro E, Xie Y, Chen Y, Li S, Huang J, Emergency Department Visits Following Suboccipital Decompression for Adult Chiari Malformation Type I, World Neurosurgery (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wneu.2020.09.068>.

Conquer Chiari's research updates highlight and summarize interesting publications from the medical literature while providing background and context. The summaries do contain some medical terminology and assume a general understanding of Chiari. Introductory information and many more research articles can be found www.conquerchiari.org