

*Scientific Studies:*

# Societal Costs of Fibromyalgia

**“Failure  
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Fibromyalgia is a disorder classified by the presence of chronic widespread pain, often accompanied by fatigue.

Have you ever wondered what fibromyalgia costs society and sufferers? Researchers at Ghent University in Belgium did and what they found is alarming!

Costs before diagnosis were compared to later costs, assuming the diagnosis had never been made. Failure to diagnose true cases of fibromyalgia increases costs in excess doctor visits, investigations, and prescriptions.

The highest cost was for tests and imaging, followed by pharmaceuticals, referrals, and repeated office visits. These costs go beyond the fibromyalgia patient to society as a whole.

Since insurance providers are often burdened with the costs, insurance rates may increase for everyone. Longer waits to see busier doctors also impacts everyone when fibromyalgia sufferers are improperly diagnosed.

Therefore, the fibromyalgia diagnosis reduces resource use and increases savings.

Thinking logically, this would apply to nearly any medical condition. If a person is not feeling well, they will keep seeking answers, additional tests, and medical opinions in order to get better. All too often those who are high users of medical care are viewed as whiners, complainers, attention seekers, or ma-

lingerers, when in reality a medical condition is undiagnosed. Once the condition is diagnosed, costs go down, treatment ensues, and the patient returns to a more productive life. Everyone wins.

Unfortunately, some providers view patients with a myriad of complaints common in chronic illnesses, such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, multiple chemical sensitivity, and other multi-system illnesses, as psychosomatic if the cause is not immediately found. It is not uncommon to have colon cancer and be told it's "anxiety". Nor is it uncommon to have Crohn's disease and be told it's "malingering". Prescribing psychiatric drugs that make the patient's condition worse draws out pain and suffering while increasing the societal cost burden.

Instead, medical providers need to be more aware of the various causes of symptoms and also be more open minded to ruling out all possible causes and listening intently to the patient with an open and believing attitude.

Patients should to do their own research and advocate for themselves. Disorders like fibromyalgia need not impact life more than necessary or cost society burdensome amounts.

**Reference**

Annemans L, Wessely S, Spaepen E, Caekelbergh K, Caubère JP, Lay KL, Taieb C. Health economic consequences related to the diagnosis of fibromyalgia syndrome. *Arthritis Rheum.* 2008 Feb 29;58(3):895-902.

