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Estimating rates of chronic fatigue syndrome from a community-based sample: a pilot study.

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Most of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) epidemiological studies have relied on physicians who refer patients having at least six months of chronic fatigue and other symptoms. However, there are a number of potential problems when using this method to derive prevalence statistics. For example, some individuals with CFS might not have the economic resources to access medical care. Other individuals with CFS might be reluctant to use medical personnel, particularly if they have encountered physicians skeptical of the authenticity of their illness. In addition, physicians that are skeptical of the existence of CFS might not identify cases. In the present pilot study, a random community sample (N = 1,031) was interviewed by telephone in order to identify and comprehensively evaluate individuals with symptoms of CFS and those who self-report having CFS. Different definitions of CFS were employed, and higher rates (0.2%) of CFS were found than in previous studies. Methodological benefits in using more rigorous epidemiological methods when estimating CFS prevalence rates are discussed.