Background: A new undergraduate curriculum of the Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University (PSU) was changed to problem-based learning (PBL) or block system. As part of the development of a new paradigm, department of anesthesiology has developed programme in cancer pain management teaching to support the new curriculum. Cancer pain management teaching to date has been integrated into the 4th and 5th clinical years of whole course. Learning experiences emphasized on student participation, reflection and critical thinking.

Objective: To assess the knowledge of, and attitudes towards, cancer pain and cancer pain management of medical students who were going to be externs.

Design: A prospective analytic study.

Materials and methods: The medical students completed a questionnaire regarding their knowledge of, and attitudes towards, cancer pain and its management.

Results: A hundred and fifteen medical students (out of 132) completed the study. Seventy six percent of the medical students thought that cancer pain patients requested higher doses of analgesics because their pain was getting worse. The majority of them (80 %) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that pethidine was superior to morphine when treating cancer pain. Almost all the medical students (96.4 %) strongly disagreed or disagreed that doses of opioids should be much lower than required to prevent an occurrence of drug tolerance. Eighty six percent of the medical students thought that inadequate knowledge about pain management was a barrier to effective cancer pain management.

Conclusions: In general, the medical students showed correct knowledge regarding cancer pain and its management. They also demonstrated a positive attitude towards the use of opioids for the treatment of cancer pain. They thought that inadequate knowledge was the barrier to effective management in cancer patients. These data will be utilised to improve an educational programme for cancer pain management in terms of both theory and practice.