

For immediate release

Contact: Chuck Weber
(847) 705-1802, cpweber@weberpr.com

American Pain Society Supports Joint Commission Program To Help Patients Talk About Pain

GLENVIEW, Ill. Sept. 30, 2008 – For most chronic pain patients, achieving effective pain management requires ongoing communication with their physicians. Today, the American Pain Society (APS) expressed strong support for the Joint Commission’s new patient outreach and education program, called Speak Out, intended to teach patients to engage in productive dialogue with their doctors about pain. While this program could help many patients communicate better, APS called on physicians to be good listeners as well.

“Untreated and undertreated pain is major public health concern in the US, and one reason many patients don’t get effective relief is they fail to communicate effectively, if at all, with their doctors about their pain,” said APS President Charles I. Inturrisi, PhD, professor of pharmacology, Weil-Cornell Medical College, NY. “While patients should be more assertive in talking about pain, physicians must become good listeners and encourage honest, frank discussion about persistent pain conditions.”

Inturrisi said APS endorses the Joint Commission’s education program and believes physicians will welcome better communication from their patients. “It’s hard for doctors to be effective pain managers if patients feel stigmatized or intimidated and won’t talk freely about their pain,” he said. “The Joint Commission’s new program can help patients overcome fear and stigma and seek help from their doctors.”

Srinivasa Raja, MD, professor of anesthesiology at Johns Hopkins University Medical School, said physicians not only should gauge pain intensity, but also learn how a patient’s pain influences overall quality of life.

When talking with patients, Raja said physicians must appreciate that pain is a multi-faceted condition and effective pain management treats the whole person, not just the pain. “Persistent pain also impairs sleep, depresses mood and damages self esteem,” Raja noted. “So doctors must learn if pain limits everyday activity and other pursuits their patients enjoy. Treatments, therefore, certainly should provide pain relief but also should help restore function and the ability and motivation to lead an active, fulfilling life.”

Raja added that as physicians encourage patients to feel uninhibited about discussing pain and possible treatments, they also must be diligent in communicating the benefits and risks of pain medications. “Once a treatment regimen has been determined, we must monitor patients carefully to determine when doses can be lowered over time as they improve their pain control and overall functioning,” said Raja.

Primary care physicians, noted Raja, should consult with pain management specialists in their communities for help in treating patients with complex pain problems.

About the American Pain Society

Based in Glenview, Ill., the American Pain Society (APS) is a multidisciplinary community that brings together a diverse group of scientists, clinicians and other professionals to increase the knowledge of pain and transform public policy and clinical practice to reduce pain-related suffering.

APS was founded in 1978 with 510 charter members. From the outset, the group was conceived as a multidisciplinary organization. APS has enjoyed solid growth since its early days and today has approximately 3,200 members. The Board of Directors includes physicians, nurses, psychologists, basic scientists, pharmacists, policy analysts and more.

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