

Spotlight On Health

Making Sense Of Arthritis Treatments

(NAPSA)—Selecting the most cost-effective way to treat osteoarthritis—OA—can be a problem or dilemma for many consumers. It is also a concern for professionals in the aging field.

Affecting more than 20.7 million Americans, OA has a sizable impact on the nation's economy, resulting in seven million doctor visits a year. As a result, the Arthritis Foundation reports that treating OA and other forms of arthritis costs the economy almost \$125 billion a year, including medical expenses and lost productivity.

To lower these costs, the American College of Rheumatology and the American Pain Society have issued guidelines for the treatment of OA, advising those with mild to moderate OA to start with inexpensive treatment options such as exercise and an over-the-counter pain reliever like acetaminophen. These organizations, both of which are independent professional, medical, and scientific societies, concluded that acetaminophen provides the same symptoms relief as the more expensive prescription arthritis medications, but usually at a lower cost and with fewer side effects like serious stomach irritation. In addition, acetaminophen will not interfere with most over-the-counter and prescription medications consumers may be taking for health problems other than OA.

But despite these recommendations, a new survey finds that most consumers don't know how to determine the most cost-effective OA treatments. Conducted by Harris Interactive for the Alliance for Aging Research, this poll of 1,000 Americans aged 18 and over finds that seven in 10 (68 percent) believe that deciding which treatments are most cost-effective is difficult and as many as 29 percent say that making this decision is extremely difficult.



It's estimated that treating osteoarthritis costs the economy over \$120 billion annually.

Because of this unease, the survey finds that many consumers are looking for help in talking to their doctor about managing their OA symptoms. Specifically, three-quarters of the public (75 percent) say they would be willing to talk to their doctor about the costs of different medications if they had the facts to guide this discussion.

In response to these findings, the Alliance for Aging research has developed a new tool for consumers—*How-To Guide For Talking To Your Doctor About Osteoarthritis*—that can be downloaded from the organization's Web site (www.agingresearch.org). The "how to" guide includes a checklist of information that a physician would need to know so that he or she can explain the most cost effective options for treating OA pain.

Said Daniel Perry, executive director of the Alliance for Aging Research: "Through this campaign, we hope to encourage more older Americans to talk with their physicians about managing their OA symptoms, recognizing that expert guidelines recommend starting with over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen that are widely available and very cost-effective."

To learn more, visit the Alliance for Aging Research Web site at www.agingresearch.org.