

Health Bulletin



Myths And Misunderstanding Common About Pain

(NAPSA)—What is the most common cause of disability in the U.S. today? The answer is pain, but in a recent survey, few people answered this question correctly.

The telephone survey by Partners for Understanding Pain, a consortium of more than 50 organizations, showed that most Americans might benefit from learning more about pain and its treatment.

“Knowledge about pain is lacking and misinformation abounds among those living with pain, as well as those in care-giving professions,” said Dr. Daniel Carr, vice chairman of research and medical director for the chronic pain management program at Tufts-New England Medical Center.

Pain is a serious public health and economic issue. According to statistics:

- Pain costs \$100 billion annually in lost workdays, medical expenses and other benefit costs;
- Pain personally affects one in three people; and
- Pain causes more disability than cancer and heart disease combined.

“The Partners for Understanding Pain want to raise awareness of both the medical and socioeconomic impacts of pain,” said Penney Cowan, executive director of the American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA), which spearheads Partners for Understanding Pain. “Access to care also is an issue. Skyrocketing health care costs leave some, especially seniors, minorities, and the urban and rural poor, unable to get the help they need to manage their pain.”

More than 50 million Americans suffer from chronic pain each year, and another 25 million experience acute pain caused by injury or surgery.

Fifty to 70 percent of cancer patients experience significant pain sometime during their illness, the American Cancer Society reports. But, experts say 90 per-



Fortunately, there is hope for people living with pain to improve their quality of life.

cent of cancer pain can be alleviated with proper treatment.

Most survey respondents are confident that their primary care physician can effectively diagnose (79 percent) and treat (83 percent) any pain problem they may have. However, most doctors receive very little training in identifying and treating pain problems among their patients.

“Few medical schools have included formal training in pain and pain management in their curriculum in the past and doctors have not felt well prepared to deal with their patients’ pain,” Carr said. “Fortunately, this is changing.”

Fear of addiction is a major concern among survey participants. More than three out of four respondents (78 percent) believe that addiction would be very or somewhat likely when strong pain medication is given to treat pain.

In fact, when prescribed for pain problems, most pain medications, including opioids, do not cause the “high” associated with street drug use and rarely cause addiction, according to Carr. Failing to provide appropriate medications to people with cancer, acute or chronic pain can cause unnecessary suffering.

For more information about pain management and the Partners for Understanding Pain, call 1-800-533-3231 or visit www.theacpa.org.