



Conquering Pain Together: September is Pain Awareness Month 2009

Access to Pain Care - Key Messages

- Pain is a growing national public health crisis that affects an estimated 76.5 million people and has serious economic ramifications. More than one-quarter of Americans (26%) age 20 years and over report that they have had a problem with pain that persisted for more than 24 hours in duration. This number does not account for acute pain.ⁱ A hallmark of many chronic conditions, pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined.ⁱⁱ
- Despite this prevalence, access to appropriate and effective pain care remains a barrier for many Americans. These barriers include:
 - limited access to health care systems, including health insurance or choice of provider;
 - limited access to prescribed pain treatments once within those systems;
 - limited access to sites of care or pharmacies that carry prescription pain medication;
 - state, legal and regulatory policies that interfere with the medical use of appropriate medicines for pain relief;
 - limited access to pain specialists who have been appropriately trained in the full spectrum of knowledge available for pain management;
 - limited pain research funding which limits the scope of treatment and curative possibilities for specific pain conditions; and,
 - negative stereotypes about pain patients that prevent early and aggressive treatment.
- These barriers disproportionately affect women and minorities.
 - Medically underserved populations endure a disproportionate pain burden in all health care settings.
 - Disparities exist among racial and ethnic minorities in pain perception, assessment, and treatment for all types of pain, whether chronic or acute.
- Improving access to care makes sound financial sense:
 - Undertreated pain drives up the cost of healthcare; it extends lengths of stay in hospitals, increases emergency room visits and leads to unplanned clinic visits.
 - The cost of pain not only includes direct costs associated with doctor's visits, diagnostics and medication, but indirect costs such as lost wages and productivity of both people with pain and their caregivers.
 - American employers lose billions of dollars a year on employee absenteeism as a result of pain.

- Lost productive time from common pain conditions among active workers costs an estimated \$61.2 billion per year. The majority (76.6%) of the lost productive time was explained by reduced performance while at work and not work absence.ⁱⁱⁱ
- When pain is treated properly, many people can resume their lives.
 - Successful pain treatment is individualized and there is evidence that multi-modal approaches are most effective.
 - By improving access to pain care, Americans in pain can receive the services they need in order to lead healthy, productive lives.
- The Bottom Line: People in pain have a right to timely, appropriate and effective pain care.

I have the power to play an active role in managing my health care and related finances, as well as advocating for improved access to pain care. As a pain care advocate, "I COMMIT to improving access to appropriate and effective pain care for all."

iNational Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2006 With Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans. Hyattsville, MD: 68-71.

ii Pain – 76.2 million people, National Centers for Health Statistics, 2006; Diabetes – 20.8 million people (diagnosed and estimated undiagnosed), American Diabetes Association; Coronary Heart Disease (including heart attack and chest pain) and Stroke – 18.7 million people, American Heart Association; Cancer – 1.4 million people, American Cancer Society.

iii Walter F. Stewart, PhD, MPH; Judith A. Ricci, ScD, MS; Elsbeth Chee, ScD; David Morganstein, MS; Richard Lipton, MD “Lost Productive Time and Cost Due to Common Pain Conditions in the US Workforce.” JAMA. 2003;290:2443-2454.