



Fact Sheet: Findings from the *Let's Talk Pain* Survey Highlight Need for Improved Communication about Pain Treatment and Management

The Problem: A Lack of Communication Between Patients and Healthcare Professionals

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 10 adults in the U.S. has experienced pain that lasts a year or more.¹ Yet even with this high prevalence of pain in our society, patients do not always know how to talk to healthcare professionals about their pain, in many cases leading to under-treatment. In addition, healthcare professionals may not always ask the right questions or listen actively to their patients. Other possible factors complicating effective pain treatment are lack of trust between the physician and patient, and insufficient time. Only patients can describe how pain affects their lives, and only healthcare professionals can both listen actively and treat patients appropriately. The quality of the conversation held in the exam room may be the key to improving pain treatment.

According to data from the *Let's Talk Pain* survey, a sizable gap exists between patients and healthcare professionals when it comes to understanding and communicating about pain. The *Let's Talk Pain* Coalition recognizes that this gap affects the treatment of pain, and is encouraging people to **talk** more about pain, **listen** actively, and **act** in ways that improve care for the millions of people who live with pain.

The national, Internet-based survey investigated attitudes and behaviors of 500 pain patients and 275 physicians treating pain. The goal was to uncover insights into the attitudes and behaviors of pain patients and healthcare professionals, and to gain a deeper understanding of important factors in pain management. In addition to uncovering a communication gap, the survey revealed that pain negatively affects an individual's ability to work outside the home, participate in regular exercise, and have healthy sexual relationships. Treatment side effects also have a substantial impact on patients' lives and limit their ability to manage pain effectively.

Key findings include:

Communication

Talking openly about pain is the foundation for a healthy relationship between a patient and healthcare professional. Survey results indicate that there is a great disparity between the two groups in opinions regarding communicating about pain. The survey also revealed that barriers such as lack of trust and insufficient time can exist between the two groups.

- ◆ While 60 percent of patients strongly agreed that they can be open and honest about their pain with their physician, less than 10 percent of physicians strongly agreed that their patients tell them the truth about their pain.
- ◆ Ninety-seven percent of the physicians surveyed strongly agreed that there is enough time to discuss pain with their patients, yet only 46 percent of patients felt the same.
- ◆ Patients and physicians still don't see eye-to-eye when it comes to pain management.
 - The majority of patients suffering from pain, 77 percent, described their pain to be severe to "the worst pain possible," while physicians reported that nearly half of their patients suffer from moderate pain.
 - Nearly 40 percent of patients agreed to varying degrees that physicians would rather treat their illness than their pain.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics Report: Health, United States, 2006, Special Feature on Pain



Impact on Daily Lives

According to the survey, pain affects virtually every aspect of a patient's life—work, sleep, exercise, social activities and relationships. Engaging in a personal dialogue about these factors not only builds a strong relationship between the patient and healthcare professional, but also reveals important aspects of a patient's pain experience that could help improve his or her health.

- ◆ Patients reported that pain had the greatest impact on their ability to exercise and work outside the home.
 - Sixty-five percent of patients said their pain strongly or completely interferes with their working outside the home.
 - Seventy-five percent of patients reported that their pain strongly or completely interferes with exercising.
- ◆ Nearly half of the patients, 48 percent, reported that pain either strongly or completely interferes with their sexual relations. Yet the physicians surveyed did not always consider this as part of the treatment plan.
 - Physicians often or always considered other quality-of-life aspects such as sleeping, maintaining an independent lifestyle, walking, and performing job responsibilities when developing a treatment approach.
 - Many physicians, 75 percent, stated that sexual relations and social activities were least important when selecting their patient's treatment plan.

Treatment-Related Side Effects

Treatment-related side effects can have a negative impact on the management of pain. Some people affected by pain dislike the side effects of opioids to the point that they choose to overlook or discontinue treatment completely. It is critical for patients and healthcare professionals to talk openly about side effects, even though it may sometimes be uncomfortable, in order to make shared and appropriate treatment decisions.

- ◆ Constipation and the occurrence of drowsiness were top sources of dissatisfaction for patients when it came to a primary opioid medication to treat their pain. Patients also were concerned with the duration of pain relief.
- ◆ Some patients choose to suffer through pain rather than put up with medication side effects.
 - Twenty-seven percent of patients reported that it's easier to put up with pain than deal with the side effects from pain medications.
- ◆ Most physicians agreed about the need for new treatments without side effects.
 - Eighty-three percent believed there is a need for new and innovative pain medications that don't have the side effects of currently available medicines.
 - Eighty-eight percent of physicians said side effects are at least sometimes an issue, while almost one in three reported side effects are often or always an issue.
- ◆ Patients and physicians agreed that side effects continue to be a factor in the discontinuation of pain medicine.
 - More than one-third of patients who experienced side effects with an opioid pain medication discontinued it due to the side effects.
 - More than 70 percent of physicians reported discontinuing patients from immediate-release and extended-release opioids due to side effects.



Regulatory Issues and Abuse

Scrutiny by the Drug Enforcement Agency and potential for opioid abuse among patients are major barriers in many physicians' prescribing choices and contribute to the under-treatment of pain. Open communication between healthcare professionals and patients may help to erode such barriers.

- ◆ Concern about regulatory scrutiny and the potential for abuse among patients runs high with physicians.
 - One-third of physicians reported that regulatory scrutiny is often or always a barrier to prescribing patterns and to reaching optimal pain treatment.
 - More than one-half of the physicians, 54 percent, had reduced the quantity of the opioid they prescribed to a patient due to concerns over regulatory scrutiny, while one-quarter of them had stopped prescribing opioids altogether due to these concerns.
- ◆ Physicians are proactive in counseling their patients about possible abuse and addiction.
 - Approximately 75 percent of physicians often or always counseled their patients about the potential to become addicted to opioids.
 - Nearly 80 percent of physicians were somewhat or very concerned about the potential for their patients to become addicted to opioids.

Other Important Findings

The *Let's Talk Pain* survey uncovered interesting attitudes and behaviors of pain patients and healthcare professionals that shed light on some of the complexities of pain management.

- ◆ Blood pressure, pulse, respiration, and temperature have been defined for many centuries as the basic "vital signs" that can indicate the status of a person's health. Pain also is now recognized by some as a "fifth vital sign", providing a useful indication for healthcare professionals to assess a patient's health and well-being.
 - Despite this, nearly half of the physicians surveyed do not consider pain as a "fifth vital sign."
- ◆ The majority of patients consulted between two and five healthcare professionals within the past year in an effort to manage their pain.
- ◆ Patients held mixed opinions towards pain treatments.
 - Nearly 80 percent of patients were satisfied with the primary opioid medication taken for their pain.
 - Nearly half of patients surveyed, 42 percent, disagreed that currently available pain medicines can really control pain.

Survey Methodology

The Let's Talk Pain Coalition commissioned a national, Internet-based survey of 500 pain patients and 275 physicians treating pain, including primary care physicians, oncologists, pain specialists, neurologists, rheumatologists, surgeons, and psychiatrists. Analytica International, a research firm based in New York, NY, conducted the survey from April 3 to 11, 2008. Founding members of the Let's Talk Pain Coalition are the American Pain Foundation, the American Academy of Pain Management, and the American Society for Pain Management Nursing. PriCara™, Division of Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., is the sponsor of the Coalition.

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