When Back Pain Is More Serious

(NAPSA)—Back pain is one of the most common medical problems, affecting an estimated four out of five people in the United States. Back pain can range from a dull, constant ache to a sudden, sharp pain that can leave a sufferer incapacitated. It can come on suddenly—from an accident, a fall or lifting something too heavy—or develop slowly, perhaps as the result of age-related changes to the spine.

Common back pain may be an indication of different diseases such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or ankylosing spondylitis (AS). AS is a type of arthritis that primarily causes inflammation of the spine and spinal joints but is also associated with other inflammatory diseases of the skin and intestines. Ankylosis means "fusion," and spondylitis means "inflammation of the spine." AS is an autoimmune disorder that affects at least half a million people in the United States. Typically, the first symptoms of AS are gradual and can include frequent pain and stiffness in the lower back and buttocks. Over time, this may progress into the upper spine, chest and neck. As the condition progresses and inflammation persists, new bone forms on the spine causing it to fuse in a fixed position, often resulting in limited mobility. In its severe form, AS can result in complete spinal fusion, which may cause extreme physical limitation. Additional symptoms may include fatigue, fever, weight loss and anemia.

Early symptoms of AS, such as frequent pain and stiffness, are indistinguishable from the symptoms experienced by those who are suffering from common back pain. AS is difficult to diagnose in the early stages and is one of the most overlooked causes of persistent back pain in young adults. Diagnosis can be delayed seven to 10 years from the onset of initial symptoms.

Differences Between AS & Common Back Pain		
Attributes	Ankylosing Spondylitis	Common Back Pain
Pain/Stiffness	Lasts for more than an hour in the morning, often improving throughout the day	Lasts for less than 45 minutes in the morning, often worsening throughout the day
Exercise/Activity	Improves symptoms	Worsens symptoms
Duration	Chronic	Acute or chronic
Onset Criteria	Develops between ages of 15 and 40	Occurs in people over the age of 40

There is no cure for AS, but there are medications that may reduce inflammation and stiffness of the joints, manage the pain and potentially inhibit the progression of disease in some people. Current treatment goals for AS include relief of symptoms; e.g., reducing pain, inflammation and spine stiffness, as well as slowing progression of the disease. Medical treatment options include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) and biologics. Exercise, physical therapy, posture techniques, heat/cold, surgery, acupuncture, massage or yoga are also recommended to improve symptoms.

"There is a large unmet need for effective AS therapies," said Katherine Culpepper, Spondylitis Association of America Executive Director. "For people suffering from AS who are dissatisfied with their current treatments, the availability of biologic medications provides patients with other treatment options that can help to manage their disease."

For people with severe disease, a class of medications called biologics, including anti-tumor necrosis factor (TNF) agents, has been shown to be effective in reducing the signs and symptoms of AS in some people. These certain biologic medications, known as anti-TNF agents, work by blocking the actions of TNF-α, a naturally occurring protein that can cause inflammation. This group of medications includes HUMIRA® (adalimumab), recently approved to reduce signs and symptoms in patients with active ankylosing spondylitis.

"Being diagnosed with AS was overwhelming. I'm a young guy, but I felt like an old man. I had trouble getting out of bed or in and out of the car and soon had to stop some of my physical activities due to the severe pain and swelling in my hips and back," says Peter Kahn, a 31-year-old with AS. "Since starting on HUMIRA, my symptoms have begun to improve, and I have been able to resume some of the activities I enjoy, such as biking and kayaking."

For more information about ankylosing spondylitis, visit the Spondylitis Association of America Web site at www.spondylitis.org. More information about HUMIRA, including full prescribing information, is available on the Web site www.rxabbott.com or in the United States by calling Abbott Medical Information at (800) 633-9110.