

Cancer Sufferers Can Get Adequate Treatment For Pain

(NAPSA)—An estimated 70 percent of cancer patients experience significant pain during their illness, yet fewer than half receive adequate treatment for their pain. When left untreated, pain impairs a patient's quality of life and the family's ability to cope.

A survey commissioned by Partners Against Pain found that the majority of sufferers (67 percent) say they experience some changes in their lives due to pain. The most frequently cited areas include quality of life (34 percent) and inability to work (23 percent). These patients are more likely than patients suffering from other diseases to say pain affects their appetite, ability to socialize, their independence and, for a few, even their ability to feed themselves.

According to the American Cancer Society, many patients do not ask for or get the help they need for pain relief because they have common misperceptions regarding pain management. Five reasons patients do not seek pain relief:

1. Fear of addiction.
2. Fear of side effects from pain medications.
3. Believe pain is an inevitable consequence of cancer.
4. Believe they should be able to tolerate the pain.
5. Believe if they experience pain it means their cancer is getting worse.

Types of Pain

Cancer patients may experience chronic pain, which can be continuous and present most of the time or intermittent pain, pain that comes and goes. In addition, many patients with chronic pain experience breakthrough pain, a temporary moderate to severe flare in pain that occurs even though the patient is taking medications regularly.

Breakthrough pain occurs despite the reduction of pain from a regular pain medication schedule. It does not mean that the pain is uncontrolled or that the pain medication has failed. It may

mean that additional pain medication that works quickly for short periods of time should be added to the patient's pain management program.

Treatment Options

Pain control options vary based on the method used to treat the cancer and the intensity of pain. Non-drug approaches such as relaxation, meditation, massage, heat or ice packs and exercise may be used to supplement pain medication.

For mild or low level pain, acetaminophen and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen may be recommended. Most people are familiar with medications purchased over-the-counter for treatment of mild or low level pain. Higher dose NSAIDs, however, are available only with a prescription and are used to treat mild to moderate pain. NSAIDs and acetaminophen, used alone, have a limit to their pain relieving effect, so taking a higher dose than specified is not advised.

For moderate to severe pain, patients may require a prescription pain medication that can include opioid analgesics, along with NSAIDs, Cox-2 inhibitors, low dose anti-depressants and acute epileptic agents. Opioids are often the most effective prescription medication for moderate to severe pain and may be adjusted to provide patients with the level of pain relief they need. The most serious risk associated with opioids is respiratory depression. Common opioid side effects are constipation, nausea, sedation, dizziness, vomiting, headache, dry mouth, sweating and weakness.

Partners Against Pain is a resource for health professionals and patients to learn more about pain management. Information and tools to help manage pain are available at www.partnersagainstpain.com or can be requested by writing to Partners Against Pain at 1 Stamford Forum, Department M, Stamford, Connecticut 06901-3431.