



When Arthritis Strikes: Recognizing Symptoms And Coping With Chronic Pain TM

(NAPSA)—Arthritis is an inflammation of the joints and is a general term for more than 100 conditions that affect an estimated 40 million Americans. Arthritis can strike at any age and can result in varying degrees of pain, inflammation and limited movement, causing a profound impact on patients' quality of life. In addition, osteoarthritis, has a significant economic impact, costing the United States nearly \$65 billion per year in medical care and indirect expenses, including lost wages and production.

One of the most common forms of arthritis is osteoarthritis (OA), which afflicts nearly 21 million Americans and is a leading cause of disability in the United States.

OA is a chronic, degenerative joint disease characterized by the breakdown of the joint's cartilage, which cushions the ends of bones. Cartilage is smooth, so the joints move easily, but are firm and supple to absorb shock. As osteoarthritis progresses, surfaces of cartilage and underlying bone become compressed and irregular. Instead of gliding smoothly, joint surfaces rub against each other, resulting in stiffness and pain. According to the national "Survey of Pain in America" commissioned by Partners Against Pain[®], three-fourths of arthritis sufferers have experienced pain for five years or more, and fewer than one-in-ten have suffered for less than a year.

Factors influencing the development of osteoarthritis include age, heredity and obesity. Moreover, OA can result from joint injuries due to sports, work-related activities or accidents. Sometimes symptoms of osteoarthritis are mild and patients may be unaware of the condition until detected by an X-ray. In other cases, joint pain can make the simplest activities impossible. In fact, 80 percent of people with OA report some form of limitation in their movement.

A diagnosis of OA is made based on a physical exam and

symptom history, with X-rays to confirm a diagnosis. Treatment is aimed mainly at symptom relief. For some patients their pain treatment will incorporate an interdisciplinary approach that may include relaxation techniques and pain medication. Physiotherapy is also valuable in helping to strengthen muscle groups that stabilize and protect the affected joint. Over the counter medications or prescription drugs like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) can alleviate most patients' mild to moderate pain. For those patients whose pain does not respond to this therapy, opioids are another option for treatment. For severe pain, opioid analgesics are the cornerstone of treatment.

Excess body weight can put excess strain on weight-bearing joints such as hips, knees and ankles, and can accelerate the progression of OA. Therefore it is important for overweight patients to lose weight.

Although each person's pain is unique, it is important for physicians and patients to realize that the pain associated with OA can be managed if diagnosed and treated appropriately. Patients should describe to their physicians where they hurt, how the pain feels, how long it has lasted and what affect it has had on their overall health and quality of life.

Partners Against Pain[®] (PAP) is a valuable resource for medical professionals and patients to learn more about pain management, including arthritis pain management. PAP offers tools to help you manage your pain, such as a Pain Control Record and Pain Control Plan. For additional information about pain management, consult with your doctor or a pain specialist. You can also get free information from Partners Against Pain at www.partnersagainstpain.com on the Internet or by writing Partners Against Pain at One Stamford Forum, Department M, Stamford, Connecticut, 06901-3431.