



spotlight on health

Dr. Joyce Brothers Teams Up With Visiting Nurses To Raise Awareness About Shingles and PHN Pain

(NAPSA)—Dr. Joyce Brothers, the nationally recognized mental health and relationship expert, has talked with people who suffer a painful condition so intense they describe it as “fire under the skin,” “electric shocks” or “unbearable stabbing pain.” Nearly one million Americans suffer from shingles or the severe long-term pain after shingles called post-herpetic neuralgia, or PHN, which can leave a person feeling helpless.

Dr. Brothers has teamed up with the Visiting Nurse Associations of America (VNAA) to help promote greater awareness and understanding of these conditions. Historically, there wasn't much that could be done to relieve the pain associated with shingles and the devastating impact of PHN. But now there are a number of treatment options available.

“These conditions can be extremely debilitating both physically and psychologically for those who suffer from them as well as for families and friends who care for these patients,” said Dr. Brothers. “The key to feeling better and finding pain relief is having the right information about coping with these conditions and treatment.”

Shingles is a painful viral infection that can occur in anyone who had chicken pox as a child. The chicken pox virus remains dormant or inactive in the nervous system. In some people, the virus awakens and ravages nerve pathways as it travels to the skin, producing a blistering rash, severe burning sensation and extreme skin sensitivity, usually limited to one side of the body. A typical case of shingles lasts about one month.

Roughly 20 percent of those diagnosed with shingles go on to

The screenshot shows the homepage of the website 'after SHINGLES'. The title 'after SHINGLES' is prominently displayed at the top. Below it, a subtitle reads 'The website dedicated to information on shingles and post-herpetic neuralgia'. A line of text indicates it is 'Sponsored by the Visiting Nurse Associations of America'. On the left side, there is a vertical menu of navigation buttons: 'About shingles', 'About post-herpetic neuralgia', 'Treatment options', 'Frequently asked questions', 'Fast facts about shingles/PHN', 'Caregiver tips', 'Glossary', 'Links to other sites', and 'Locate a VNA near you'. On the right side, there is a large photograph of a group of people, including a man in a white lab coat (likely a doctor or nurse) interacting with several patients. A small 'TM' trademark symbol is visible in the bottom right corner of the image area.

VNAA's Web site, www.aftershingles.com and toll free number 1-800-888-2227, provide information on shingles and PHN.

suffer PHN, a painful condition so intense it can hurt to wear clothing. The pain, which results from damage to the nerves during the shingles infection, persists long after the shingles virus heals. For some PHN sufferers, all normal activity comes to a halt for months. Depression is common in people with PHN, because of the severe pain and social isolation that can occur.

There is no cure for PHN. Treatment focuses on relieving pain. The most commonly prescribed medications are strong pain relievers containing opioids and antidepressants. Only one medication, the topical patch, which contains a 5 percent solution of lidocaine, is specifically approved by the Food and Drug

Administration for treatment of PHN. The patch is applied directly to the painful areas of the skin, releasing the lidocaine from the patch to the damaged nerves causing the pain.

“I encourage patients and caregivers to get more information about these conditions,” said Dr. Brothers. “I hope patients and caregivers will visit the VNAA's Web site or call its toll-free information line with facts about shingles and PHN treatment.”

VNAA has developed a comprehensive Web site with information about shingles and PHN for patients and caregivers alike. The Web site address is www.aftershingles.com. Recorded information also is available by calling 1-800-888-2227.