



spotlight on health

Growing Older Doesn't Have To Be Painful

(NAPSA)—Up to 50 percent of elderly people living at home and up to 80 percent of elderly people living in nursing homes suffer from important pain problems of various origins. In fact, the incidence of pain was twice as great in those over age 60 than in those 60 and under. Yet, despite the widespread occurrence of pain among elderly people, many are not treated adequately and continue to suffer.

For a variety of reasons, elderly patients themselves will not discuss their pain. Many older people consider pain to be a natural part of the aging process that cannot be treated, while others fear that reporting pain may reveal the presence of a serious disease. In addition, older patients will often not report pain in order to avoid the possible side effects of the medications that may be prescribed or to avoid bothering or annoying their caregivers and physicians. Finally, because older patients may be at the mercy of mental impairments as a result of stroke or Alzheimer's disease, they are often not even able to express the pain they suffer to their health care providers.

Older people are more likely to suffer from chronic medical conditions and as a result have a higher risk of experiencing chronic pain. In fact, up to 80 percent of people older than 65 are thought to have arthritis, a major cause of chronic pain. And according to the American Pain Foundation, approximately 20 percent of people older than 60 suffer from chronic pain as a result of arthritis, joint pain or back pain. Other conditions that commonly are associated with chronic pain in the elderly are:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Back pain
- Physical disability

The physical and emotional distress that elderly patients must endure due to chronic pain is undeniable. Because of its unremitting nature, chronic pain often causes depression, avoidance of

Caregivers may help relieve the suffering of their loved ones by learning to recognize some of the behavioral responses related to pain:

- Changes in mood
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Increased worry or anxiety
- Changes in role performance
- Alterations in sleep pattern



social situations, trouble sleeping, anxiety and a loss of appetite. In addition, chronic pain may also hinder a person's mobility and even independence.

Fortunately, effective treatments for pain are available and it is important for elderly patients to realize that pain can be managed. Medications, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), other non-opioid analgesics and opioids are commonly used for pain management, as are non-drug treatments, such as activity modification.

Caregivers may help their loved ones seek appropriate treatment and find relief for their pain. By learning to recognize the symptoms of chronic pain and by encouraging a dialogue about pain with their physician, caregivers can help their loved ones speak up about their suffering and learn not to shy away from sharing their pain with their physicians.

Additionally, Partners Against Pain® (PAP) is a valuable resource for patients, caregivers and medical professionals to learn more about pain management. PAP offers tools to help you manage pain, such as a Pain Control Record and a 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 or by writing Partners Against Pain at One Stamford Forum, Department M, Stamford, Connecticut, 06901-3431.