

Decade of Pain Control and Research: Now Is the Time to Do Something about America's Pain Crisis; Photo Available

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Body

Leading national pain organizations and a member of Congress said today that for too long effective pain care has been overlooked as a national health priority, even though chronic pain is the nation's leading public health problem, affecting 1 in 5 Americans. They also emphasized that now, more than ever, there is new hope as the Decade of Pain Control and Research, mandated by Congress, is spurring action to draw attention to the pain crisis and promote long-awaited legislation to increase federal funding for pain treatment, education and research.

"Unfortunately, pain has been an invisible malady in our society for too long," said Richard Payne, MD, president of the American Pain Society and chief of pain and palliative care at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. "It doesn't generate headlines that build high awareness levels, and there are numerous medical, social, cultural, educational and economic forces that make it difficult for many to achieve optimal pain relief. The Decade of Pain Control and Research offers a new platform on which clinicians, patients, educators, researchers and policy makers can unite behind programs and policies to enhance pain awareness and elevate pain to the top of the nation's health policy agenda."

"Pain can kill. It can kill the spirit, vitality and the will to live," said Joel Saper, MD, president of the American Headache Society and director, Michigan Head Pain and Neurological Institute. Saper added that chronic pain takes a greater toll on the US economy in health-insurance claims, lost wages and impaired productivity than any other chronic condition, including heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. "While science has made great strides with major advances in treatments and the growth of specialized care and treatment centers, we have not yet achieved a sufficient influence over this enormous public health problem," he said.

Representing the American Academy of Pain Medicine, Marc B. Hahn, DO, dean of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine at the University of North Texas Health Sciences Center, reported that only 3 percent of

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medical schools have a separate required course on pain management and only nine MD faculty members in the US list pain medicine as their primary specialty. "To effectively treat current and future generations of patients in pain, it is imperative that we educate the next generation of physicians," Hahn said.

At Last, A Pain Bill

This year, for the first time, a comprehensive, proactive pain bill has been introduced in Congress, which culminates many years of effort by the pain community to develop federal pain legislation. Sponsored by Rep. Mike Rogers, (R. Mich.), the National Pain Care Policy Act of 2003 potentially is the most significant initiative of the Decade of Pain Control and Research. The legislation would give the National Institutes of Health the authority to establish six regional pain centers and calls for allocation of \$60 million to improve pain-care training, educate pain patients about pain management, provide access to pain treatment for those who need it, and expand pain research.

"The goal of this bill is to stimulate improvement in pain research and extend accessibility of care to more and more Americans suffering with chronic pain," said Rogers. "It's about giving people with daily, hourly pain real hope for the future."

Mary Vargas is a Washington-area attorney and chronic pain patient. Speaking on behalf of the American Pain Foundation, a national patient advocacy group, Vargas said pain patients throughout the country must step forward and urge their representatives in Congress to support the Rogers bill. "Pain sufferers and their families have a unique opportunity to do something that will bring new hope for everyone who endures chronic pain everyday," said Vargas. "We applaud Congressman Rogers for introducing this legislation, and we will lobby vigorously at the grassroots for its passage."

Ad Campaign to Build Awareness

Payne announced that a new, first-ever, television and radio public service advertising campaign, sponsored by the American Pain Society, begins next month and is intended to increase public awareness of the plight of people in pain.

"A critical goal of the Decade of Pain initiative is to maximize public and professional understanding of pain and pain management, and the advertising campaign will show what it's like to live with pain everyday," said Payne. He explained that the ads will direct viewers and listeners to a new website to learn more about Decade of Pain activities. The site contains information about various programs, links to professional and patient organizations and information about the Rogers bill with advice on how to communicate and mobilize support for it.

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