

PAINMEDICINENEWS

Pain Coalition Hopes to Bridge Gap in Patient-Physician Trust

By David Wild

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Mutual mistrust mars communication between pain specialists and patients, a recent survey has found. The national survey, of 775 pain patients and their physicians, found that 90% of doctors who treat pain believe patients are not honest with them about their pain, and that 40% of patients feel they cannot be open with physicians about the topic.

In response to these findings, several of the country's leading pain groups are spearheading an initiative to improve communication between such patients and their doctors.

"Conversations regarding pain management don't happen as often as they should," said Scott Fishman, MD, chief of pain medicine and professor of anesthesiology at the University of California at Davis School of Medicine and president of the American Pain Foundation. "However, when we coach patients to talk about pain, they get better care."

The *Let's Talk Pain* Coalition is the first of its kind to bring patients, caregivers and health care professionals together to encourage better communication regarding pain, according to a press release. Member organizations include the American Academy of Pain Management, the American Pain Foundation and the American Society for Pain Management Nursing. The coalition is sponsored by Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, which manufactures the pain medications Duragesic, a transdermal formulation of fentanyl, and Ultram ER, an extended-release version of tramadol.

The coalition gauged communication between pain patients and their physicians through a national online survey of 500 patients and 275 doctors. The latter included primary care physicians, oncologists, pain specialists, neurologists, rheumatologists, surgeons and psychiatrists.

The survey revealed that four in 10 patients felt that they could not be open and honest about their pain with their physician, and that nine in 10 physicians believed their patients were not telling them the truth about their pain. Pointing to one possible reason for the communication gap, the survey found that 46% of patients felt they did not have ample time to discuss their pain. Only 3% of physicians said they did not have adequate time during appointments to discuss pain with their patients.

Dr. Fishman said some physicians may be treating their patients' pain inadequately because they are apprehensive about the regulatory complexities of prescribing controlled substances. However, he added, the *Let's Talk Pain* initiative may help improve the management of pain.

Health care professionals who visit www.letstalkpain.org will find strategies to engage their pain patients. For example, the Web site includes a list of questions for opening a discussion about a patient's pain and treatment expectations. The Web site also serves as a clearinghouse for information about pain, including a glossary of pain terminology and pain conditions for patients, and explanations of how pain is assessed.

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