



POLICY STATEMENT

STATEMENT ON PAIN RECOGNITION AND ASSESSMENT IN OLDER ADULTS

Preamble

Unrecognized and untreated pain is a serious problem in this country, especially among older adults. Health professionals often fail to include pain in the assessment of older adults unless the patient specifically raises the issue. Pharmacists are the most accessible health professional and are often the first to be contacted by patients who complain of pain.

Pharmacists have the opportunity to improve the quality of life for senior patients by promoting the recognition, assessment and adequate treatment of pain. The senior care pharmacist is trained in pain recognition and assessment and has access to seniors, their caregivers, and other healthcare professionals.

The purpose of this statement is to encourage health professionals to better recognize and assess pain in older adults and to encourage pharmacists to assist patients, caregivers, and other health professionals with pain recognition, assessment, and treatment.

Background

Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience. Unrecognized and untreated pain is prevalent in the United States. Sixty-two percent of nursing home residents have pain¹ and 25-50% of community dwelling seniors suffer significant pain problems.² Pain is the most common reason for visits to physicians, healthcare clinics and pharmacies. Certain diseases and conditions that can cause chronic pain are more prevalent in older people, but the presence of pain is always abnormal.

The consequences of chronic pain among elderly individuals include depression, decreased socialization, sleep disturbances, impaired ambulation, deconditioning,

gait disturbances, falls, slow rehabilitation, polypharmacy, malnutrition, increased healthcare utilization and costs and decreased quality of life. Because there are no objective markers of pain, the most accurate evidence of pain and its severity is the patient's self-report. Thorough assessment is crucial. Pain management is most successful when the underlying cause of pain is identified and treated definitively.

Position

The American Society of Consultant Pharmacists strongly supports the comprehensive assessment of pain in older adults. The identification of unrelieved pain is an integral part of complete patient care. Health professionals should be alert to signs or symptoms of pain whenever contact occurs with an older adult, and pain should be explored whenever patient assessment occurs.

The Society encourages pharmacists to participate in pain recognition, assessment and treatment, including the following activities:

- Educate the public and health professionals about pain
- Recognize and assess pain, especially in older adults
- Provide treatment recommendations to prescribers
- Evaluate treatment outcomes and provide feedback to prescribers

References

1. Ferrell BA et al. Pain evaluation and management in the nursing home. *Ann Intern Med* 1995;123:681-7.
2. AGS Panel on Chronic Pain in Older Persons. *J Am Ger Soc.* 1998;46:635-51.
3. ASCP Pain Resource Page at:
<http://www.ascp.com/public/pr/pain.shtml>

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