

## **Key Messages: DRAFT 2.07 – FOR REVIEW BY APF & MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PCF**

*To convey information clearly and concisely, refer to this message track when speaking to the public, the media, healthcare professionals and policy makers. Keep the main points in mind, but also make sure that you relate these to your own personal experience.*

Recent media has extensively covered the increasing abuse and misuse of prescription drugs -- a critically important public health issue. However, related to it is another public health issue of significant importance-- the under treatment of serious pain. Drug abuse and unrelenting pain can both deny people their dignity and their lives. Both issues must be addressed with balance and common sense. Left unaddressed, these public health issues are a collision course that will lead to an escalation in tragic outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

### **Pain is a national healthcare crisis. It is our Nation's hidden epidemic.**

- ✓ Pain is the number one reason people seek medical care: More than one-quarter of Americans (26%) age 20 years and over -- or, an estimated 76.5 million Americans -- report that they have had a problem with pain of any sort that persisted for more than 24 hours in duration. [NOTE: this number does not account for acute pain].
- ✓ **Undertreated pain has serious physiological, psychological, and social consequences.**
  - Pain weakens the immune system and slows recovery from disease or injury.
  - Pain costs our economy \$100 billion in medical costs and lost workdays. Left untreated, pain drives up healthcare costs because it extends lengths of stay in hospitals, increases emergency room visits, and leads to unplanned clinic visits.

### **Overly restrictive regulatory policies impede pain relief. Prescription drug abuse is a major issue; however, people with severe, long-term pain may need access to strong pain medications that may include opioids.**

- ✓ We must not let people with pain become casualties of the "War on Drugs."
- ✓ Efforts to prevent the diversion and abuse of pain medication must be balanced so they do not interfere with appropriate and effective care for people with pain.
- ✓ Concerns about regulatory scrutiny may lead healthcare professionals to underutilize opioid analgesics.
- ✓ \*\*\*Do we want an ethical message...along the lines Myra discussed...like if as a HCP if you know the right thing to do and you don't do it...or the moral obligation to treat suffering???? Myra I can't remember your exact wording...
- ✓ \*\*\*Do we want a message about the HCP responsibility to assess for pain as well as for potential substance abuse?
- ✓ **Other barriers to effective pain care include:**
  - The public—including doctors and people with pain—often believe that opioid medications are addictive and produce euphoria. The fact is that when properly prescribed by a healthcare professional and taken as directed, these medications give relief—not a "high."
  - Pain carries a stigma. Many people with pain are fearful or embarrassed to let their families, friends, and even their healthcare professionals know they are in pain—because they don't want to appear weak, labeled as a addict, or be considered a bad patient.
  - Funding for pain research is woefully inadequate: Less than one percent of NIH funding is dedicated to pain research.
  - \*\*\*Do we want some kind of message that talks about the reality of abuse and diversion but how criminal behavior should not dictate health policy?

### **When pain is treated properly, many people can resume their lives.**

- ✓ Medical treatment is available today to manage most pain, so people with pain should not suffer needlessly.
- ✓ People often mistakenly believe that pain is something they "just have to live with." They are often made to feel that the pain is "just in their heads."

**The Bottom Line: People in pain have a right to timely, appropriate pain care.**

*These messages reflect the work of the American Pain Foundation and the Pain Care Forum, and were reviewed and updated in February 2007.*