

Media Advisory – Interview Opportunity

Prescription Opioid Abuse - What is the Real Problem and How do we Fix it?

Toronto, ON – November 15, 2011 – Recent media coverage and new provincial regulations have questioned the use and impact of prescription opioids for the treatment of chronic pain in Canada. A pain and an addiction expert call for a balanced and informed dialog surrounding the issue of prescription opioid abuse in the current issue of *Canadian Family Physician*.ⁱ According to the Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey (CADUMS), one in five Canadians age 15 and older have used an opioid pain-medication in the previous year. In this survey, only one per cent of users (or 0.2 per cent of the total) said they used opioids for the experience, the feeling they cause or to get high. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of people taking an opioid are using it for pain management.

Student population studies in the Ontario and Atlantic Provinces have found similar rates of opiate use in the range of 17 to 20 per cent in grades 7-12 with rates increasing with age. The Atlantic Provinces survey acknowledged that the question “In the past 12 months, have you taken pain killers ... without a prescription or without a doctor telling you to do so?” may have also tapped into the use of opiates for pain.

“This data shows we have two serious public health problems. One is an ongoing silent epidemic of chronic pain and the other is an increasing problem of prescription opioid misuse. The solution for substance misuse and addiction is to provide public and professional education and timely access to mental health and addiction treatment programs. The approach to chronic pain should be the same,” states Dr. Mary Lynch the lead author and past president of the Canadian Pain Society and Co-chair of the Canadian Pain Summit and Strategy. “We live in a society where animals get better pain treatment than humans. This is not surprising given that a Canada wide survey of university undergraduate programs identified that veterinarians receive five times more training in pain assessment and management than do medical students.”

Solutions that reduce opioid misuse should not penalize people with pain. We need a national pain strategy which includes timely access to appropriate pain management resources along with education regarding safe prescribing of pain medications.

Interview Opportunities

Commentary authors Dr. Mary Lynch and Dr. Benedikt Fisher along with provincial pain experts with the Canadian Pain Society are available to discuss prescription opioid related topics with members of the media.

About the Canadian Pain Society (www.canadianpainsociety.ca / www.twitter.com/canadianpain)

The Canadian Pain Society has been a chapter of the International Association for the Study of Pain since 1982. The aim of the CPS is to foster and encourage research on pain mechanisms and pain syndromes and to help improve the management of patients with acute and chronic pain by bringing together the basic scientists and health professionals of various disciplines and backgrounds who have an interest in pain research and management.

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For further information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

Rob McEwan

Argyle Communications

(416) 968-7311 ext. 242

rmcewan@argylecommunications.com

ⁱ Prescription opioid abuse: What is the real problem and how do we fix it? M.E. Lynch, MD FRCPC and Benedikt Fischer, PhD. *Canadian Family Physician* November 2011 57: 1241-1242