

**Spring, 2008**

**Dr. Peper's Wellness Program Newsletter**

***What is your Relationship with your Pain Medication?***

One of the most common ways to treat chronic pain is with pain medication. Taking pain medication becomes a part of the daily routine. However, most people don't think about the type of relationship they have with their medication. As with any relationship, your relationship with your pain medication can be healthy or unhealthy, comfortable or tense and even love/hate. Chronic pain patients often experience unnecessary emotional distress related to the medications they take. Developing a better understanding of your relationship with the pain medication you are prescribed can help you determine the best way to resolve any anxiety, fears or resentment you feel about taking the medication. The information that follows is provided to help you better manage this often difficult relationship.

**Consider your Expectations**

*Do you expect the first medication you are prescribed to take care of your pain?*

The reality is that each person is different and it is nearly impossible to predict the side effects you will experience. Keep in mind that finding the right medication (or combination of medications) is a process. It also takes time to find the right balance between side effects (for example sleepiness) and pain reduction. An ongoing discussion with your physician will help keep things on track.

*What degree of pain reduction is reasonable?*

If you expect your pain to be eliminated and it is not realistic, you will become frustrated and disappointed. Ask your doctor what degree of pain relief you should expect from your medication, and be open to other ways to treat your pain. Pain medication is only one part of treating chronic pain and the effect it has on your life.

**Know the Differences between Addiction, Dependence and Tolerance**

*Addiction*

Fear of addiction can cause a lot of suffering, both physically and emotionally. Addiction involves the abuse or misuse of pain medication, and is more likely to occur if you have a history of drug or alcohol addiction or you are under a great deal of stress. Medication itself cannot cause addiction. Addiction is caused by a combination of psychological, biological and social factors. Signs of addiction can include; not taking medication as prescribed, running out of medication early, getting prescriptions for a medication from more than one doctor and taking the medication for non pain-related reasons (to escape, deal with stress, avoid feelings, or because you enjoy the way the medication makes you feel). To avoid potential problems, it is critical to immediately discuss with your doctor any changes you make in how you take your prescribed medication.

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### *Physical Dependence*

While taking certain medications such as opioid narcotics, a patient's body chemistry adapts to having the medication in it. When this change occurs, patients can experience withdrawal symptoms when decreasing or discontinuing the medication. Although withdrawal can be associated with addiction, physical dependence does not mean you are addicted. The most common problem associated with physical dependence is patients experiencing serious withdrawal symptoms when they go "cold turkey" and suddenly discontinue a medication. It is important to consult with your doctor before decreasing or discontinuing any prescribed medication. Your doctor can give you a schedule to taper off your medication without experiencing unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.

### *Psychological Dependence*

Pain medication can mean the difference between experiencing tolerable vs. intolerable pain. Sometimes this can lead to patients being very worried and even feeling desperate when thinking about running short or not getting a renewal of their prescription in time. The relationship between patients and their pain medication can become extreme and in some cases the focus becomes the medication, not pain management. Psychological dependence describes an unhealthy relationship with medication, and the emotional contributing factors (e.g., fear of uncontrolled pain or anxiety) need to be addressed.

### *Tolerance*

When the body becomes used to some pain medication, it may take larger doses of medication to achieve the same pain control. Developing tolerance is common with pain medication and does not mean you are addicted to your medication.

### **What is the Role of Wellness Program?**

Each patient has a personal relationship with their pain medication. This complex relationship is about more than just taking the medication; it involves psychological factors as well. For example, some patients wait as long as they can before taking their pain medication because they resent having to depend on pain medication or they think they can "tough it out." Unfortunately, this strategy can result in the patient experiencing unnecessary emotional distress when their pain levels go up and they feel it is out of control. Understanding what it means to take pain medication is sometimes the most important part of patients establishing a successful relationship with their medication.

Dr. Peper provides treatment that includes assisting patients in achieving a personally acceptable balance between pain management through medication, and quality of life. Treatment takes into consideration the emotional toll often associated with the need to take medication. It focuses on eliminating the negative emotions associated with taking pain medication by identifying the contributing factors and working with the patient to create healthier, more functional alternative strategies. Rather than feeling controlled by their medication, patients begin to see the choices they have in how they manage the role of medication in their lives. Chronic pain may cause physical restrictions but it should not leave patients feeling like they have lost themselves as well. If you are interested in treatment with Dr. Peper, ask your doctor for a referral or call Kari Kies, behavioral health coordinator at (623) 742-1514 to schedule an appointment.