

Testimony of
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Testimony before the Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee
United States Senate

Hearing on OxyContin
February 12, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The American Society of Pain Management Nurses (ASPMN) is an organization of professional nurses dedicated to promoting and providing optimal care of patients with pain, including the management of its sequelae. The organization feels strongly about advocating for appropriate care and against the many barriers that may affect care to patients with pain.

Currently, pain is “untreated, under treated or ineffectively treated for over 75 million Americans each year” (American Pain Foundation, 2000). A silent epidemic of pain and suffering is occurring in our nation. As nurses, we witness this tragedy every day and we are ethically bound to advocate for our patients. Opioids, including OxyContin®, are one of many options that may be necessary for appropriate pain relief. Though there is a concern about misuse and diversion of these medications as a significant public health problem, there is another and even greater public health issue ... the undertreatment of pain.

ASPMN would like to address the issue concerning the use of and access to opioids for patients who suffer with pain whether related to chronic conditions or life-threatening illness. Opioids are appropriate for chronic pain conditions and “an essential part of the pain management plan,” as cited by the consensus statement from the American Academy of Pain Medicine and the American Pain Society (1997) as well as supported by the AHCPR Pain Guidelines (1992; 1994).

As one of the over 20 healthcare organizations, ASPMN supported the joint statement released in collaboration with the Drug Enforcement Administration in October 2001 (see attached). Overall, we support the call for balance and agree with the DEA Administrator Asa Hutchinson that there is no further need for legislative remedies to curb the illegal diversion of controlled substances. Yet there is a need to protect and improve access to all the treatment options to manage pain effectively.

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ASPMN believes that people diagnosed with the disease of addiction should receive appropriate medical care. However, legitimate patients with pain should not be denied treatment because of the destructive behaviors surrounding addiction or, even worse, the activities of criminals. ASPMN would strongly oppose legislation that would increase barriers to legitimate patients obtaining needed appropriate medications. In 2000, Congress proclaimed this the Decade of Pain Control and Research. ASPMN supports legislation that:

- ***Provides for a National Report on the Problem of Pain***
- ***Improves Pain Management Education for Healthcare Professional, Caregivers and the Public***
- ***Reduces regulatory barriers that inhibit effective Pain Management***
- ***Increases Federal Support for Pain Research***
- ***Expands reimbursement for Pain Management Services***
- ***Requires Pain Assessment and Treatment of Unrelieved Pain in all healthcare settings***

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these issues. ASPMN offers its support and willingness to be available for collaboration to facilitate a balanced approach regarding OxyContin.

CC: Members of the HELP Committee

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