



-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FOR PAIN LEADING TO ALARMING RISE IN DEATHS

Physical Therapy an Alternative to the High Risks of Methadone

Tallahassee, Florida, August 18, 2008 – A recent investigative report¹ published in the *New York Times* highlights the alarming increase in methadone prescriptions for the treatment of chronic spinal pain. The result has been a shocking increase in methadone related deaths. Physical therapists can play a role in providing patients and physicians with an alternative to dangerous pain medications like oxycodone and methadone.

Methadone was once limited to use in addiction treatment centers to replace heroin, but today it is frequently given out by physicians to manage spine and joint pain. The Drug Enforcement Administration noted that from 1998 to 2006, the number of methadone prescriptions increased by 700 percent. “Many legitimate patients, following the direction of their doctor, have run into trouble with methadone, including death,” noted pain specialist Dr. Howard A. Heit from Georgetown University. Florida alone, which keeps detailed data, listed methadone as a cause in 785 deaths in 2007, up from 367 in 2003.

“These are senseless deaths,” said Dr. Timothy Flynn of Regis University in Denver, CO, and President of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT). “Patients should be aware that these medications are not the best option to reduce the symptoms of spinal pain. Research has shown that early movement and treatments like exercise and spinal manipulation offer strong benefits to spine pain and disability.” “The medical management of spinal pain in this country is a failure,” continued Flynn, “we too often initiate prescription drug therapy before choosing safe and effective alternatives.” Flynn suggests that patients seek out physical therapists as a first-line treatment for these conditions.

A February 2008 report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that from 1997 to 2005, pharmaceutical expenditures for the management of low back pain increased by 171% while the rate of good outcomes fell. “All the imaging we do, all the drug treatments, all the injections, all the operations have some benefit for some patients,” said Richard A. Deyo, a physician at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland and a coauthor of the report. “But I think in each of those situations we've begun using those tests or treatments more widely than science would really support.”

For more on the benefits physical therapists can provide in the management of spinal pain, contact your nearest physical therapist or visit the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists website at www.aaompt.org. AAOMPT represents physical therapists by promoting excellence in orthopaedic manual physical therapy practice, education and research.

Dr. Richard Deyo, MD, MPH will be the key note speaker at AAOMPT's Annual Conference in Seattle this November. The conference theme will focus on pain management and physical therapists' role in this important area of care.

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¹www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/us/17methadone.html?ex=1376712000&en=857a1ef1d4e38769&ei=5124&partner=permalink&expod=permalink.

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