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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  

Department of Defense and Veterans Health Administration to Develop Common Pain Curriculum to Reduce Disparities in Care  

March 19, 2015, NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) are developing a common pain education and training curriculum, as reported today in a scientific poster at the 31st Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Pain Medicine. A major concern for the DoD and VHA medical leadership was the impact from the variability in pain management education on the patients transitioning between the two medical systems.

The cycle is self-perpetuating in that inconsistent training and clinical guidance also leads to variability in clinical practice and a negative impact on patient outcomes. To break the cycle, the Joint Pain Education Program (JPEP) was chartered to develop the curriculum for use across the military and veterans’ healthcare systems.

“The development of a common pain management education curriculum is a great example of the improving coordination of care across the DoD and VHA,” said Rollin Gallagher, M.D., VHA deputy national program director for pain management.

Another objective of the joint project is to strengthen pain management support for the patient-centered, team-based models of care that form the foundations of the Patient Centered Medical Homes in DoD and Patient Aligned Care Teams in VHA.

The pain and general health care of military personnel and veterans can be complicated by numerous complex conditions that include traumatic brain injury, depression and substance abuse. Both systems have taken the lead in crafting consistent policies and models to address pain care, starting with the 2009 VHA Pain Management Directive and the 2010 DoD Pain Management Task Force Report published by the Office of the Army Surgeon General. These two documents highlighted the absence of clear pain management guidance for clinicians and patients across the VHA and DoD that paralleled similar challenges faced by civilian medicine. Pain management training and education for the professionals who treat the nation’s military and veterans vary widely as a result.

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The lack of synchronized guidance across the two federal health systems is further exacerbated by a general lack of adequacy in pain management training for all healthcare professionals, as documented in the 2011 Institute of Medicine report on pain in America (“Relieving Pain in America: A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education, and Research.” National Academies Press [US]; 2011). The IOM report clarifies that interdisciplinary management, including pharmacologic, cognitive-behavioral, psychologic and physical treatments, is optimal for pain care delivery. However, education in specific disciplines and in interdisciplinary care is lacking, particularly in medical schools and residency programs.

The funding for the JPEP effort stems from the 2003 National Defense Authorization Act, which first established a Joint Incentive Fund (JIF) to which the DoD and VA both contribute resources to support innovative sharing initiatives. The JPEP is being coordinated through the Defense and Veterans Center for Integrative Pain Management (DVCIPM).

*Poster 189 – VA/DoD Joint Pain Education Program*

**About AAPM**
The American Academy of Pain Medicine is the premier medical association for pain physicians and their treatment teams with over 2,500 members. Now in its 32nd year of service, the Academy’s mission is to optimize the health of patients in pain and eliminate pain as a major public health problem by advancing the practice and specialty of pain medicine through education, training, advocacy and research. Information is available on the Academy’s website at [www.painmed.org](http://www.painmed.org).