Global Initiative Spreads Knowledge and Recognition to Institutions That Battle Childhood Pain

March 19, 2015, NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – Because children suffer from unrelieved pain in hospitals around the world, leaders from 14 countries created a global initiative to disseminate new knowledge and recognize best practices with a special certification. The ChildKind initiative promotes the incorporation of child comfort into the culture of pediatric healthcare facilities by encouraging an institutional commitment to pain relief, according to a scientific poster describing the program, on view today at the 31st Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Pain Medicine (AAPM).

“It is hoped that the lure of a prestigious internationally-sanctioned award that attests to their ongoing commitment to providing a uniform approach to pain relief will offer an adequate incentive for institutions to overcome whatever barriers they are encountering in providing pain relief to all children,” lead author, Neil Schechter, M.D., wrote in an executive summary describing the initiative. Schechter is executive director of ChildKind, director of the Chronic Pain Clinic at Boston Children’s Hospital and associate professor of anesthesia (pediatrics) at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass.

ChildKind, the recipient of the 2015 Robert Addison Award of AAPM for promoting international collaboration regarding pain relief, is set for a formal launch this year. Since the successful pilot of the accreditation process in four North American children’s hospitals (Boston Children’s Hospital, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Seattle Children’s Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto), 20 additional institutions have expressed interest in receiving ChildKind certification.

Knowledge about pain in children has increased dramatically over the past 25 years, yet a significant number of children in healthcare settings still experience unnecessary pain. Approximately 20 to 30 percent of children in high-income countries and 80 to 100 percent of children in low-income countries experience unnecessary pain while hospitalized (Schechter et al, Pediatric Pain Letter, December 2010, Vol. 12 No. 3. Available at: www.childpain.org/ppl). Although a number of strategies have been attempted to improve pain care such as educational initiatives, guideline development and quality audits, barriers often remain and practice behavior remains unchanged.

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The guiding philosophy of ChildKind is that sustained change is more likely if pain control is a core institutional value and commitment, similar to confidentiality or safety.

“Interventions such as lectures and audits are more likely to impact on behavior if they fit into an institutional culture in which addressing pain is an expectation,” Schechter explained. “In that way, appropriate pain management does not rely on the memory or good graces of any one practitioner but instead becomes part of the institutional fabric.”

ChildKind emerged from the Special Interest Group on Pain in Childhood at the 7th International Symposium on Pediatric Pain. An organizing meeting was held in November 2008, in Bellagio, Italy, at the Rockefeller Foundation Study Center with the support of the Mayday Fund, the Institute of International Education and the Rockefeller Foundation. At that meeting, 20 experts in pediatric pain representing 14 countries as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), established ChildKind criteria that include the presence of a facility-wide pain policy, ongoing education, evidence of a developmentally-appropriate process for pain assessment, evidence-informed pain management protocols and continuous quality improvement.

It was felt that these core principles could be incorporated in any institution regardless of resource availability, assuming adequate commitment. Modeled after the hugely successful WHO and UNICEF effort to encourage breastfeeding in hospitals known as the Baby Friendly Hospital Program, ChildKind is meant to represent an alternative to other models, which may be more punitive in nature and are often less successful. ChildKind has been endorsed by major international health organizations including IASP, the Canadian Pain Society, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists, the International Pharmaceutical Federation, the Royal College of Nursing, the Child Life Council and the Canadian Nurses Association.

Schechter is hopeful that the core philosophy of ChildKind will spread: “The outpouring of interest in this initiative is testimony to the role it will play in enhancing the humane care of children in healthcare settings.”

Those interested are encouraged to visit www.childkindinternational.org for more information. The website serves as a clearing house for information on pediatric pain and will provide technical assistance to institutions attempting to improve the quality of pain management that they provide.

Poster 199 – The Development of ChildKind: A Global Initiative to Reduce Pain in Children

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.