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AAPM Statement on DEA Proposal Allowing Multiple Prescriptions for Controlled Substances

GLENVIEW, Ill.— The American Academy of Pain Medicine (AAPM) is heartened that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has proposed returning to their previous position, which allowed physicians to issue multiple prescriptions for controlled substances when appropriate. AAPM hopes their new policy statement indicates that the DEA is returning to its previous position of balance in the effective treatment of pain and effective control of prescription drug abuse.

AAPM welcomes the re-opening of important issues faced by concerned physicians who must strike the necessary balance in providing legitimate pain control. Under the DEA's proposed rule change, the "Do Not Fill Until..." provision would allow physicians to write three separate prescriptions with staggered fill dates so patients can be given the equivalent of a 90-day prescription for schedule II controlled substances when medically appropriate. Schedule II drugs have a recognized medical use as well as a potential for dependence and abuse. Consequently, these drugs are carefully controlled and regulated by the DEA.

This potential reversal by the DEA could eliminate the burden previously imposed on cancer patients and others with chronic pain who were forced to visit their physician every month for new pain medicine prescriptions when there was no medical necessity to do so. The proposed change also allows physicians to carefully control the amount of controlled substances issued to a patient at one time. "Do Not Fill Until..." prescriptions may be issued by the week for at-risk patients, or by the month to comply with insurance reimbursement regulations.

With today's policy statement, the DEA appears to recognize the need for policies that support effective control of drug abuse without harming the appropriate treatment of pain. On behalf of legitimate patients who suffer in pain, AAPM continues to be concerned with how law enforcement and other regulators balance the public's need for effective policies that address the dual crises of prescription drug abuse and undertreated pain. AAPM is committed to safe and effective treatment of pain and to effective policy on prescription drug abuse.

The American Academy of Pain Medicine was a contributor to the Federation of State Medical Boards Model Policy for the Use of Controlled Substances in the Treatment of Pain and has developed educational programs for physicians on pain assessment, opioid usage, detection of addiction, and prevention of diversion. The American Academy of Pain Medicine is the organization representing physicians who specialize in treating complex pain disorders.

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