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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 29, 2006

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AAPM Statement on Methadone Use

GLENVIEW, Ill. – The American Academy of Pain Medicine supports the continued availability methadone and other potent opioids for prescribing, in accordance with State and Federal Regulations. Any additional restrictions or regulatory barriers will have an adverse impact on patient care, and will contribute to unnecessary suffering among patients who need and deserve quality pain care.

Over the past ten years, there has been an expanded effort on the part of physicians to improve the quality of life and end needless suffering for the many patients with constant daily pain. The administration of potent opioid analgesics is an essential component of pain treatment, and remains a highly effective means of reducing pain.

Methadone, a potent long-acting opioid, has been shown to be very useful in the management of pain related to cancer and other chronic pain conditions. Methadone's qualities, including prolonged duration of action, low cost, and unique effect on various pain pathways, makes it an extremely useful and indispensable analgesic in the treatment of pain. It is essential that methadone remain available to physicians for the treatment of pain.

Unfortunately, the appropriate use of potent opioids has been associated with prescription drug diversion within many communities. Prescription drug diversion typically results from theft, misrepresentation, and "doctor shopping" on the part of unscrupulous individuals. The misuse of potent prescription opioids can contribute to unintentional opioid overdoses, with potentially lethal consequences.

Inappropriate use of methadone, particularly among opioid naïve individuals, is particularly hazardous, and is increasingly associated with fatal accidental overdoses. Because of the unique toxicities associated with methadone, it is inherent upon the prescribing physician to understand the pharmacology and pharmacokinetics of this agent, to properly counsel, educate, and monitor their patients treated with methadone to minimize the risks of accidental overdose and drug diversion.

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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