

Organizations Offer Roads to Improve Pain Management Care in Emergency Department

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Emergency departments in the United States receive more than 110 million patient visits annually. In up to seventy percent of those patients, pain is the presenting complaint.

Treating pain is the challenge, and two organizations are now offering avenues that could lead to better treatment of pain in the ED, as well as other issues affecting emergency care. The organizations are the new United States Chapter of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA, www.ima-wf-usa.org) and the Pain and Emergency Medicine Institute (PEMI) at Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan.

"These organizations can share the latest research, and spread it around the globe," says Knox Todd, MD MPH FAAEM, Professor of Emergency Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Director of PEMI. "For example, research that shows a high prevalence of inadequate pain treatment in the emergency room and identifies risk factors such as extremes of age, ethnicity and cognitive function. Research also finds extensive small and large area variations in emergency department pain management practices."

That might be because few emergency nurses or physicians are engaged in the study of emergency department pain management practices. The new organizations will encourage this kind of study.

"One result of a lack of sharing information," says Dr. Todd, "is the outdated practice of withholding analgesics for ED patients with acute abdominal pain because of the fear of masking the diagnosis."

"It is an example of the substantial gaps that remain between existing knowledge and daily pain management practice in the emergency department," he says.

Dr. Todd and others want to close this gap by providing:

- a) resources and information about best practices;
- b) education to emergency care providers; and
- c) the facilitating of research to promote improved practice.

He wants to build on the success of past research collaborations and identify themes to create opportunities for research among colleagues. This will also involve creating a network of emergency nurses and physicians committed to these goals.

Advanced Israeli Medicine

The IMA's new U.S. chapter will provide visits to and exchange programs with Israeli medical facilities for its member U.S. physicians, especially in the areas of emergency medicine and disaster recovery.

Pinchas Halpern, MD, Chair of the emergency department at Tel Aviv Medical Center and senior lecturer of emergency medicine, anesthesiology and critical care at Tel Aviv University, explains that the field of emergency medicine in Israel can not only offer advanced learning to U.S. physicians, but different philosophies of operating EDs as well.

"There seem to be fewer barriers in Israel, such as shorter waiting times in the ED and less fear of opiates," he says.

"In Beersheba, I observed how the field of emergency medicine was being practiced, with a multidisciplinary approach," says Roman Skylar, MD MBA FACEP, Medical Director of Aventura Hospital and Medical Center in Aventura, Florida. "In the U.S., we learn all aspects of medicine from the ED physicians, while in Beersheba, I learned it from the specialists themselves. I also observed how organized the trauma teams were and the set up of the facilities. It was quite impressive!"

"As I advance my career into becoming an ED director, observing the inner workings of EDs in other countries with fresh and different ideas will benefit my patients with fresh ideas for our facility setup."

But American emergency physicians also have something to offer their Israeli colleagues through visits to U.S. facilities and international conferences.

"Bringing people together in the U.S. and Israel means more cooperation and learning for both," says Dr. Todd.

The Goals

Dr. Halpern would like to see medical centers around the world:

- a) make pain management part of the routine quality assurance and improvement system of the ED and the entire hospital; and
- b) instill in their staffs the understanding that pain belongs to and can only be gauged by the patient. Therefore, it can only be treated adequately if we respect this understanding.

In its programs, the IMA's U.S. chapter will take on issues like the above by identifying emergency physicians and nurses with similar interests and create opportunities to enhance communications between them and their Israeli colleagues.

Dr. Halpern says, "The goal for me is to make the alleviation of pain a routine, self evident priority for all ED physicians and nurses, so we do not need to continually remind them of it. The issues in acute pain management are similar in many ways across the world, and much can be learned from each other."

And Dr. Todd reminds us, "Brennan, Carr and Cousins have written that, '...a coherent international consensus is emerging: The unreasonable failure to treat pain is poor medicine, unethical practice and is an abrogation of a fundamental human right'."

For more information about the Israeli Medical Association, visit www.ima-wf-usa.org.