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Taking the Pain Out of Pain Research

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A recent Google search on the word "pain" produced an astounding 190 million hits-- a daunting amount of data for just about anyone to navigate, let alone harried physicians or pharmacists. This is the challenge that led to the creation of www.Pain-Topics.org, an evidenced-based pain management Web site designed as an unbiased clearinghouse of free-of-charge news, information, research, and education covering the causes and effective management of pain.



The screenshot shows the homepage of Pain-Topics.org. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Patient Resources, Site Policies, and Contacts/About Us. Below this is a secondary menu with links for FAQs, Guidelines/Reports, Educational/CME Leader, and Related Websites. A third menu includes Clinical Concepts, Non-Opioid Therapies, Opioid Rx, and Addiction Topics. The main content area features a large heading "PAIN TREATMENT TOPICS" and a search bar. Below the heading, there is a section titled "About Pain-Topics.org..." which discusses the "Decade of Pain Control and Research" (2001-2010) and the mission of the site. The page also includes a "Sponsors" section listing Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, a "Forum" section, and a "Links" section with various professional organizations. At the bottom, there is contact information for Stewart B. Leavitt, PhD, and a copyright notice for 2005-2007.

"We recognized that the pain management field was flooded with information from all directions--journals, magazines, CME seminars, associations. It's mindboggling,"

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Payment is required for the exam to be graded.

says Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Stewart B. Leavitt, MA, PhD. "Pain-Topics.org organizes the best of what we find that is quick and easy to access."

Leavitt, who has more than 30 years of experience in medical communications and has worked for NIH as well as a number of pharmaceutical companies, says his methadone treatment research laid the groundwork for Pain-Topics.org. "In the late 1990s, I noticed that a lot of patients seeking methadone treatment for addiction were also experiencing pain, and their addiction often resulted from abuse of prescribed opioid analgesics."

With the opioid addiction trend intensifying in the first part of this decade, doctors, said Leavitt, were undergoing close scrutiny. "There was clearly a lot of crossover between opioid prescriptions and addiction treatment, so we really needed to do something in the pain management arena," he said. Leavitt adapted the basic format of ATForum.com, a noncommercial clearinghouse for addiction treatment research that he launched in 1992, sponsored by Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, St. Louis, Missouri, to create Pain.Topics.com in January 2006. †

The criteria for including content on the site, which now receives some 15,000 unique visitors each month, says Leavitt, is that it is "scientifically valid and noncommercial, as well as trustworthy." The site does not list brand names or accept advertising, and it receives funding from unrestricted educational grants, including Founding Sponsor Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals.

Pain-Topics.org divides broadly into resources for patients and clinical research. Patient Resources offers carefully evaluated booklets, fact sheets, articles, and other vehicles that health care providers can provide to patients. This section covers general pain resources, arthritis, back and neck pain, cancer pain, chronic pain, head! = ache, opioid/medication safety, and palliative care.

On the research side, Clinical Concepts features patient history, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment through pharmacologic or nonpharmacologic interventions. Nonopioid Therapies covers pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatments from an evidence-based, clinical perspective, and Opioid Rx--the most frequently visited section--covers the use and misuse of methadone and other opioid treatments. Addiction Topics addresses the interrelationship of pain and dependency.

Many Features, Formats

Pain-Topics.org features an Education/CME Locator with links to online CME resources, some downloadable as MP3s. Language Matters covers how terminology and pain treatment converge, and News and Research Updates features original reports, some of which are peer-reviewed. Site visitors can also download pdf versions of *e-Briefings*, a newsletter covering pain research news, and they can sign up for email notifications of when the Web site is updated through a simple, noninvasive registration tool. The Related Web Sites section takes visitors to about 350 noncommercial, evidence-based sites in the pain research area.

To optimize the site's ease of use, there are no dropdowns, and live links take visitors directly to pain articles and other resources, rather than simply redirecting them to another site's homepage to fend for themselves. Future plans for coverage on Pain-Topics.org, says Leavitt, include a section on dosing equivalents for NSAIDs and opioid analgesics, drawn from some 40 sources.

To comment on this article, contact editor@uspharmacist.com.

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