



Preface

Chronic pain management



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Chronic or persistent pain is a major health problem affecting millions of people in the United States, contributing to impaired quality of life and escalating medical costs. At least one third of adults are estimated to live with chronic pain and its resultant impacts [1,2]. The economic impact of chronic pain alone can be devastating to the patient and to society with an estimated \$75 to \$100 billion spent each year on persistent pain problems in the United States [3]. Pain management challenges remain at the forefront of quality improvement activities to improve care and quality of life for patients. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) revised standards published in 2000 focused renewed attention and emphasis on quality pain care across organizational care settings [4]. It is essential that nurses, as the primary patient and family advocates, be informed on issues and challenges in pain practice and practice recommendations to assist with clinical decision making in caring for patients in pain. Effective management of chronic pain, in particular, requires knowledge of current approaches to pain assessment and treatment.

This issue of *The Nursing Clinics of North America* is dedicated to topics that address some of the many challenges faced when caring for patients with persistent pain problems. The older population is particularly affected by the presence and impact of chronic or persistent pain problems. Several authors have addressed issues and strategies that target the general and older adult populations. For a thorough review of strategies for managing persistent pain in older adults, the reader is referred to a recently published book that presents an interdisciplinary approach to this problem with

specific focus on older adults [5]. Comprehensive pain assessments are necessary to guide treatment choices and to recognize and address factors that influence response to intervention. Dr. Arnstein provides an overview of the prevalence of chronic pain, the transition from acute to chronic pain, assessment domains and strategies, diagnostic reasoning, and strategies for using assessment to tailor intervention strategy selection and optimization of treatment effectiveness. Ms. Gunnarsdottir, Ms. Donovan, and Dr. Ward review barriers to management of chronic pain, in particular cancer-related pain, and the role of educational interventions. They additionally provide suggestions for current practice and future research. Pharmacological management strategies are paramount in addressing persistent pain problems. Issues related to current analgesic practices and recommendations for safe and effective use for the management of persistent pain problems are discussed with emphasis on opioid use by Dr. Vallerand. Ms. Gordon focuses on nonopioid and adjuvant use. Nonpharmacological interventions also may be offered along with pharmacological intervention to promote synergistic effects, often allowing lower analgesic dosing and reduced adverse analgesic effects [6]. Dr. Dalton and Mr. Coyne provide a discussion of cognitive-behavioral therapy and its role in managing chronic pain, including a review of recent literature and suggestions for individualizing therapies to accommodate the patient's unique situation or needs. As many chronic pain problems are related to musculoskeletal disturbances, physical modalities can be quite useful. Drs. Rakel and Barr provide a review of selected physical modalities, including research evidence and recommendations for individualizing physical therapies to maximize effectiveness. Complementary or alternative medicine (CAM) therapies are requested frequently by patients, with up to 66% of chronic pain patients reporting use of CAM, often without their health care provider's recommendation or knowledge [7]. Nurses must be informed about therapies available to patients, the level of evidence supporting these interventions, and be able to offer guidance for safe and wise consumer choices. Dr. Snyder and Ms. Wieland provide discussion of selected CAM therapies and the nurses' role in guiding patient choices and implementing therapies. Many chronic pain patients still report active employment and experience workplace issues related to disabilities and resulting economic challenges. Dr. Faucett and Ms. McCarthy address issues and strategies for managing chronic pain problems in the workplace and the role of the nurse in advocating for the patient. Although the number of chronic pain patients who develop substance abuse and addictive disorders is small in those without prior history of substance abuse, the patient with prior substance abuse or addiction requires complex skills to effectively manage care. Dr. Compton and Mr. Athanasos discuss the challenges in assessing and treating chronic pain in patients with substance abuse issues. When patients with chronic pain fail to respond effectively to standard analgesic and nondrug or complementary therapies, invasive interventional treatments may be considered. Ms. St. Marie provides an overview of these

treatment options and recommendations regarding the role of the nurse in educating and supporting the patient selecting interventional approaches.

Although this issue could not address all aspects of assessment and management of chronic pain, we hope you will find current information on selected topics that are important and addressed in a manner that will serve as a resource and inform the practice of those interested in improving the quality of care of their chronic pain patients.

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