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State Health Officials, Medical Experts and Advocates Want Roll Back of Aggressive Pain Management Rules

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Dozens of health care organizations, medical experts, and consumer advocacy groups today sent petitions to both the federal agency overseeing Medicare and the Joint Commission to request changes in pain management standards that are fostering dangerous prescribing practices.

Shatterproof founder and CEO Gary Mendell is one of the signers, which also include senior health officials from Pennsylvania, Vermont, Alaska and Rhode Island, as well as heads of professional organizations including the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

“The over-prescription of opioid painkillers is one of the root causes of the epidemic that is killing 30,000 of our fellow Americans every year,” Mendell said. “In 15 years, the number of opioids prescribed has quadrupled. It is no coincidence that the number of overdose deaths has quintupled over the same period.”

The petition sent to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) calls for removal of the pain questions from the agency’s patient satisfaction survey, known as HCAHPS, which is used for determining hospital reimbursement rates.

“Aggressive management of pain should not be equated with quality healthcare as it can result in unhelpful and unsafe treatment, the end point of which is often the inappropriate provision of opioids,” the letter reads. “The petitioners believe that linking hospital reimbursement to patient satisfaction with pain treatment results in overprescribing of opioids.”

A further cause of this tragic loss of life has been a campaign that called for pain to be treated as if it was a vital sign, just like temperature, breathing rate, blood pressure and pulse. In 2001, the Joint Commission, an agency that accredits health care organizations, introduced pain management standards that required health care organizations to ask every patient about pain, leading to use of pain patient scales and hospital policies requiring aggressive pain management.

The petition calls for the Joint Commission to reexamine its Pain Management Standards. “Pain is a symptom, not a vital sign,” the letter reads. “Mandating routine pain assessments for all patients in all settings is unwarranted and can lead to overtreatment and overuse of opioid analgesics.”



Both letters are attached.

About Gary Mendell

Gary Mendell is the founder and CEO of Shatterproof. Mr. Mendell founded Shatterproof to spare others the tragedy his family suffered with the death of his son Brian, who lost his battle with addiction in 2011. Mr. Mendell is the founder and former CEO of HEI Hotels & Resort and the former president of Starwood Lodging Trust.

About Shatterproof

Shatterproof is a national organization committed to protecting loved ones from addiction to illicit and prescription drugs, and alcohol, and ending the stigma and suffering of those affected by this disease. Shatterproof provides information and resources for those living with addiction and their families, enabling powerful new evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment, and recovery, and takes the issue to the steps of Capitol Hill.

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