

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION'S SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT SUPPORTS PHYSICAL THERAPY TO RELIEVE PAIN IN PATIENTS AT RISK OF HEART DISEASE

ALEXANDRIA, VA, February 28, 2007 — In a scientific statement by the American Heart Association (AHA), doctors are cautioned to change their approach to prescribing pain relievers for patients at risk of heart disease and to begin with physical therapy and other non-pharmacological treatments.

According to AHA's scientific statement: "Use of Nonsteroidal Antiinflammatory Drugs. An Update for Clinicians." that appeared in the February 27 issue of *Circulation*, non-pharmacological approaches such as physical therapy should be considered for initial treatment for musculoskeletal symptoms that result from tendinitis/bursitis, degenerative joint problems (osteoarthritis), and inflammatory joint problems (rheumatoid arthritis).

"We advise physicians to start with non-pharmacological treatments such as physical therapy and exercise, weight loss to reduce stress on joints, and heat or cold therapy," said Elliott M Antman, MD, FAHA, lead author of the AHA scientific statement.

"Clearly consumers need to know that physical therapy is an effective non-pharmacological approach to relieving pain," said APTA President R Scott Ward, PT, PhD. "Physical therapists diagnose and treat individuals who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. A person coming to a physical therapist will receive a complete musculoskeletal examination and an individualized treatment program to reduce pain and improve function."

There are many types of pain and inflammation that can be reduced by a physical therapist's intervention. For example, chronic pain in the back, shoulder, or knee, or pain associated with certain degenerative diseases such as osteoarthritis, can be reduced with the appropriate combination of medication and exercise. "The physical therapist, in collaboration with the patient and the patient's physician, can help the patient manage his or her health over the long term," explained Ward.

"Physical therapists, who treat nearly 1 million people every day, also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles," Ward said.

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. PTs examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability.

The American Physical Therapy Association (www.apta.org) is a national organization representing nearly 70,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students nationwide. Its goal is to foster advancements in physical therapist education, practice, and research. Consumers can access "Find a PT" to find a physical therapist in their area, as well as physical therapy news and information at www.apta.org/consumer.