

April 13, 1999

The Honorable Ron Wyden
516 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), the nation's largest medical specialty society whose more than 110,000 members practice internal medicine and its subspecialties, I am writing to express our support for your bill, the "Conquering Pain Act of 1999."

As you know, far too many Americans suffer from severe pain. This is particularly true for patients with terminal illnesses. There are many reasons for this situation including: lack of training and education for physicians and other health care professionals; patients' ill-informed expectations about pain treatment; reimbursement policies that do not provide incentives for palliative care approaches; and inappropriate government regulation. Unfortunately, the federal response to this dire situation thus far has been wholly inadequate.

Your bill, however, will go a long way toward helping patients get the care they need. It explicitly recognizes the federal responsibility to help ensure that patients who suffer from pain receive the best possible care. By providing physicians and other health care professionals with access to the latest information about pain management, holding health plans and hospitals accountable for improving pain treatment, and coordinating the activities of the federal government, the Conquering Pain Act of 1999 holds the promise of immediate improvements in patient care. In addition, the studies called for by the bill to examine Medicare payment policies and regulatory barriers that impede effective pain management will help policy makers develop long-term solutions.

In sum, the Conquering Pain Act of 1999 takes the action necessary to improve pain treatment for patients and the ACP-ASIM stands ready to work with you to get this proposal enacted. If we can be of any assistance, please feel free to call me or Michael J. Werner, JD, Counsel for Legislation and Policy, ACP-ASIM, at (202)-261-4541.

Thank you for your efforts on this important matter.

Sincerely

Harold C. Sox, MD, FACP
President