

April 29, 2003

ITALY REFORMS NATIONAL POLICY FOR CANCER PAIN RELIEF AND OPIOIDS

Blengini, C., Joranson, D. E. & Ryan, K. M.

An article describing recent steps taken to reform national narcotics and opioid prescribing policy in Italy was published in the March 2003 issue of the European Journal of Cancer Care. National experts have previously reported that cancer pain is inadequately treated and that opioids are underutilized. The International Narcotics Control Board expressed concern that the consumption of opioid analgesics in Italy is low compared to other developed countries in Europe, and that opioids may not be sufficiently available for the relief of pain in suffering cancer patients. The reasons include strict national requirements for prescribing, including the complex Special Prescription Form and limitation of prescriptions to an 8-day supply.

A working group appointed by Italy's Ministry of Health (MOH), using technical assistance from the Pain & Policy Studies Group (PPSG) and the World Health Organization's guidelines for achieving balanced opioids control policy, issued a proposal to reform national policy in 2000. The proposal was adopted by Italy's Parliament in 2001. The new legislation included: revision of the prescription form so that it is similar to the standard form for reimbursable drugs; increase of the prescription quantity to a one month supply; ability to prescribe two drugs on a single prescription form; adding several pain medications to the list of reimbursable drugs in the national healthcare system; and allocating funds to improve physician education and public awareness of cancer pain management. If implemented by the government and health professionals, these changes can be important steps toward relieving cancer pain in Italy.

To view the article, please visit the Pain & Policy Studies Group web site at <http://www.medsch.wisc.edu/painpolicy/publicat/03ejcc/index.htm>