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NEWS RELEASE
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**UW PAIN GROUP WORKS WITH ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE
ACCESS TO PAIN MEDICINE FOR CANCER, AIDS PATIENTS**
New law could serve as a model for other nations

MADISON – A University of Wisconsin group has taken the Wisconsin Idea worldwide, helping the Romanian government make badly needed pain medicine more readily available to thousands of patients who had previously faced onerous government barriers to obtaining such medication.

The result – a more humane and effective drug-control policy in what was once one of the world’s most repressive regimes – is described in this week’s edition of *The Lancet*, one of the world’s leading medical journals.

In 2003, the Pain and Policy Studies Group (PPSG) at the UW Comprehensive Cancer Center was invited by the Romanian Ministry of Health to work together on recommendations to change drug regulations in Romania. Since 1969, during the regime of deposed leader Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania has had extremely complex requirements for patients to obtain opioid analgesics, the category of medications considered the mainstay for relieving moderate to severe pain. Only oncologists from certain state hospitals could authorize prescriptions for these medications beyond a 3-day period, and then only for incurable cancer and certain other specified conditions. Families of patients were required to first obtain a certificate from the family doctor, take it to the state hospital for authorization, then back to the family doctor for the actual prescription, then to a selected pharmacy for the drug. Even then, such 15-day prescriptions could be written for only up to three months, and any changes in dosage required the whole process to start again. As a result, many patients were never able to obtain effective pain relief when they needed it, and many died before all the paperwork could be completed.

The PPSG worked with the Romanian Ministry of Health and its palliative-care

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commission to identify regulatory barriers to pain relief and recommend a balanced approach that would control illicit narcotics use and diversion while ensuring that essential pain medicines be readily available to patients who need them. The Romanian parliament adopted a new law last November, and the Health Ministry is now completing new regulations for the prescription of opioids.

“This project has opened the door to a new era for pain patients in Romania, and we hope it will be a positive example of how an outdated law can be reformed into one that reflects balance,” says PPSG Director David Joranson. “Sadly, the number of patients with pain due to cancer or AIDS in eastern Europe is expected to grow in the next decade. This joint effort is going to make a very concrete difference in the lives of thousands of people.”

The project was also supported by the World Health Organization, of which the PPSG is a collaborating center.

The article is available on the PPSG Web site, www.medsch.wisc.edu/painpolicy.