

Update for Primary Care Physicians

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, there are nearly 40 million people over the age of 65 in the United States — approximately one in eight Americans (13 percent of the population). That number is expected to reach 72 million by the year 2030, or nearly 20 percent of the projected population. With more people living longer, primary care physicians are seeing more cases of aging patients with a variety of degenerative brain and spine disorders, brain and spinal tumors, and cerebrovascular diseases that may lead to stroke.

In an effort to provide primary care physicians with information they need to recognize neurological issues in aging patients and give informed counsel to their patients on treatment options, the Eisenhower Neuroscience Institute recently held its Annual Update for Primary Care Physicians. The day-long event, held on March 20, 2010 at the Rancho Las Palmas Resort and Spa in Rancho Mirage, was attended by more than 120 physicians, nurses and allied health professionals. The physicians in attendance included not only primary care physicians, but also specialists who focus on health issues related to aging patients, including neurologists, neurointerventionalists, gerontologists, and specialists in pain management.

The conference chairs for the 2010 Neuroscience Update for Primary Care Physicians were Eisenhower Neurosurgeon Shahin Etebar, MD; Neurologist Bishoy Labib, MD; and Joseph Scherger, MD, Vice President, Primary Care, Eisenhower Medical Center. In addition to moderating the program, each of the chairs also led a session focused on a specific topic. Dr. Etebar spoke on the evaluation and management of low back pain, and Dr. Labib provided an update on latest advances in acute intervention for stroke. Dr. Scherger's presentation focused on fibromyalgia, an often-misunderstood chronic condition characterized by widespread pain in the muscles, ligaments and tendons. Fibromyalgia occurs in approximately two percent of the population, and the risk for the disease increases with age.

Other topics covered in the 2010 program included advances in brain tumor management, treatment of the aging spine, the latest technology in brain imaging, sleep disorders, and the prevention and management of complications of ischemic stroke.

Sami Harik, MD, chairman of the neurology department at the University of Arkansas School for Medical Sciences, spoke about the medical management of Parkinson's Disease. The Parkinson's Disease Foundation estimates that one million Americans are living with Parkinson's Disease, with 60,000 Americans diagnosed with the disease each year. The onset of Parkinson's correlates with age, with most cases presenting in patients more than 60 years of age.

"People are living longer, and primary care physicians are seeing more and more patients with a variety of neurological disorders that correlate with aging, including degenerative spine and brain disorders, and stroke," explains Dr. Etebar. "It's important to provide them with the most up-to-date information available on the treatment and diagnostic options that are now available. By focusing on the challenges that doctors face every day in the treatment of aging patients, we can help primary care physicians make more accurate diagnoses, and as a result, develop better treatment plans."