Bladder Health: Specific Condition and Background Information

Bladder Control

An estimated one-third of American adults ages 40 and over report urinary incontinence at least “sometimes.”1

Despite negative health consequences, less than half of patients seek treatment for their bladder control problems.2,3 A majority of those that do talk to their health care providers delay for more than a year from symptom onset.4

Reasons cited for not seeking help include the belief that bladder problems are untreatable, natural consequences of aging, and hygiene problems rather than treatable medical concerns.5

Nursing home admissions due to urinary incontinence are estimated to cost $6.0 billion annually.6

Millions of Americans have neurogenic bladder – a lack of bladder control due to a brain, spinal cord or nerve problem such as spinal cord injury, diseases such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Parkinson’s disease, stroke or spina bifida, or nerve problems caused by diabetes or major pelvic surgery.7

At least 80 percent of Americans living with Multiple Sclerosis report bladder symptoms at the time of diagnosis, yet studies have shown that only 43 percent of people with MS experiencing moderate to severe bladder symptoms had ever been evaluated by a urologist.8,9

Urinary Tract Infections

Urinary tract infections cause over 8 million health care provider visits each year (over 1.3 million for children, over 1.2 million for men and over 5.3 million for women).10

Urinary tract infections can lead to urosepsis and death, especially among vulnerable populations such as the elderly and people with MS or spinal cord injury.11

Interstitial Cystitis

An estimated 4 to 12 million Americans (men, women, and children of any age or race)12 may have interstitial cystitis (IC). IC is a condition characterized by recurring pelvic pain, pressure, or discomfort in the bladder and pelvic region, and urinary frequency (needing to go often – up to 60 times a day in severe cases) and urgency (feeling a strong need to go).

There is currently no known cause, diagnostic test, or cure for interstitial cystitis, which is responsible for over 2.2 million physician office visits yearly.10 IC also has limited effective treatments.

Bladder Cancer

An estimated 76,960 Americans (about 58,950 men and 18,010 women) are diagnosed with Bladder Cancer each year. An estimated 16,390 people (about 11,820 men and 4,570 women)13 will die from Bladder Cancer this year, and more than 575,000 Americans currently live with bladder cancer.14
Veterans’ Bladder Health

More than 1 in 10 military service members injured in Afghanistan and Iraq have “urotrauma” injuries (damage to the urinary tract or reproductive organs). While urotrauma may not be as visible as amputations or as widely discussed as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it is no less physically and psychologically debilitating.15

Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with PTSD or other mental health diagnosis are twice as likely to have lower urinary tract symptoms than veterans without a mental health diagnosis.16 Among women veterans, those with PTSD were more likely to experience urgency and mixed urinary incontinence.17 Unfortunately, this means that many of our most vulnerable veterans are doubly burdened with bladder problems, as well as their mental health issues.

8 Foster, H. Bladder symptoms and MS, MS Quarterly Report 2002, 21 (Spring).
12 http://www.ichelp.org/about-ic/what-is-interstitial-cystitis/4-to-12-million-may-have-ic/, accessed 12/29/15.