

Stop Hiding

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Last month's editorial noted that in the past several years, a growing body of data has suggested that psoriasis is associated with systemic comorbidities, including metabolic syndrome and increased cardiovascular risk.¹ However, the systemic sequelae are not the only extracutaneous manifestations of the disease. We have long been aware of the impact that psoriasis has on lifestyle and its psychosocial ramifications. Psoriasis is a chronic disease with physical, psychosocial, and economic implications that commonly interfere with patients' daily functional capacity and, consequently, quality of life.

In 2006, the National Psoriasis Foundation surveyed more than 500 patients with psoriasis (n=389) and psoriatic arthritis (n=163) and found that 80% of respondents with psoriasis and 85% of respondents with psoriatic arthritis considered their disease to be a moderate to large problem in their lives.² Data from this survey underscore the psychosocial impact of psoriasis; specifically, 48% of respondents reported strong feelings of anger and frustration, 40% reported feeling helpless, and 38% reported self-consciousness. Of 405 respondents, 29% reported explaining their psoriasis to others 1 to 3 times per week, while 11% explained their disease at least once daily. Patients with more severe psoriasis reported explaining their disease to others more often.²

Although studies vary, approximately 1 in 4 patients with psoriasis experience substantial psychological distress.³ Patients with psoriasis have been shown to have a higher rate of depression and suicidal tendencies than patients without psoriasis.⁴ In a study of Italian patients with psoriasis (n=2391), depression was reported in 62%. A significantly higher proportion of women exhibited depressive symptoms compared to men (63% vs 61%, respectively; $P<.03$), but interestingly, men younger than 40 years were significantly more likely

to report depressive symptoms than men 40 years and older (67% vs 58%, respectively; $P<.002$). In addition, respondents with a higher level of education (high school/university) were significantly less likely to report depressive symptoms than respondents with a primary or secondary education (32% vs 51%, respectively; $P<.02$).⁴

Given the difficulties experienced by individuals with psoriasis, it was exciting to learn of a new initiative designed to help them. The American Academy of Dermatology and the National Psoriasis Foundation collaborated to form the "Stop Hiding From Psoriasis" public education campaign to address the needs of the psoriasis community. Funded with support from Abbott Laboratories, the campaign launched in September 2008. This campaign has the following objectives: (1) educating the general public about how this chronic disease affects nearly 7 million Americans; (2) motivating patients with psoriasis to "stop hiding" and "start living"; and (3) encouraging patients to see a dermatologist and discuss appropriate ways to manage their disease.⁵ LeAnn Rimes, a musical artist with psoriasis, is serving as a spokesperson for this campaign to raise awareness of the disease and encourage others with psoriasis to talk to their dermatologist about its impact.

A recent survey demonstrated that public awareness about psoriasis and its impact are very low.⁶ Approximately half of the respondents reported that they are uncomfortable around individuals with psoriasis, particularly in situations such as restaurant service or shaking hands at a meeting. The survey also found that most respondents (86%) reported that they have heard of psoriasis, but nearly half (48%) are not very or at all familiar with the condition. In addition, more than half (57%) of respondents become uncomfortable when they are being served in a restaurant by someone with psoriasis and half may be uncomfortable accepting a date with someone who has psoriasis.⁶

This new campaign should serve to help health-care professionals in dermatology and our patients as we confront psoriasis. Healthcare professionals and patients can get more information and join the campaign at www.stophiding.org.

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