The State of Psoriasis: Research, Therapy, and Advocacy

The National Psoriasis Foundation offers several avenues for physicians to connect with patients and ensure better care.

BY TED PIGEON, SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Just a couple of months ago, psoriasis made national headlines for a study elucidating the link between psoriatic disease and type 2 diabetes. As clinicians know, diabetes is but one of many comorbidities with psoriasis that published accounts have highlighted in the last decade. And while the press coverage put an important spotlight on psoriasis, it also underscored the importance of better understanding the disease on the part of sufferers and non-sufferers alike. With National Psoriasis Awareness Month set to unfold in August, the National Psoriasis Foundation (www.psoriasis.org) offers clinicians a number of ways to get involved in efforts to raise awareness and improve care for patients. Ahead Noe Baker, Public Relations Manager for the Foundation, discusses the latest developments in psoriasis research and advocacy.

THE STATE OF CARE

Given the range of research threads that continue growing in the field of psoriasis, Ms. Baker notes that it is an exciting time. “Psoriasis patients have more options than ever for treatments to manage their condition. In recent years, newer and more effective therapies on the market help treat psoriasis,” says Ms. Baker. While the market has seen new biologic therapies in recent years, such as the highly efficacious ustekinumab (Stelara, Janssen Biotech), the pipeline also appears to hold promise for psoriasis patients. “With 11 new drugs in Phase III clinical trials this year, it is an exciting year for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis treatments,” says Ms. Baker. “There are several promising new biologic therapies that target different pathways for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis—in this case IL-12 and IL-23—than current anti-TNF drugs. These potential therapies may be very beneficial to patients who are not able to take prescribed anti-TNF treatments or don’t find success with them,” explains Ms. Baker. Also in the pipeline is an injectable agent (currently in Phase III trials) for psoriasis in children, Ms. Baker notes.

In addition to innovations in therapy, Ms. Baker explains that physicians are becoming more aware of the other health complications associated with psoriasis and are educating their patients on adopting healthy behaviors to reduce the risks of developing a comorbid condition. Physicians are becoming more aware of the other health complications associated with psoriasis and are educating their patients on adopting healthy behaviors to reduce the risks of developing a comorbid condition.

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Another exciting study funded by a Psoriasis Foundation grant is from Dr. Nicole Ward at Case Western in Ohio, and, according to Ms. Baker, it is the first study to show exactly how psoriasis and cardiovascular disease are connected. “Dr. Ward’s research also proved that by treating psoriasis, patients actually reduced their risk of heart complications,” Ms. Baker observes.

INITIATIVES AND ADVOCACY
The National Psoriasis Foundation offers several programs and initiatives for patients with psoriasis and physicians. For example, Ms. Baker points out that the Foundation has a growing Walk to Cure Psoriasis program, with more than 21 walks in cities around the country. “In just five years, our walk program has raised $5 million for research and other activities,” says Ms. Baker.

Each year, the Psoriasis Foundation also awards research grants, such as those mentioned above. Ms. Baker explains that these grants are awarded to projects with the greatest likelihood of advancing treatments and leading to a cure for psoriatic diseases. “This year, we awarded more than $2 million to 26 scientists—the most dollars and grants in our organization’s history,” says Ms. Baker. The Foundation also funds Medical Dermatology Fellowships to encourage young clinicians to study medical dermatology and enhance the field of experts in psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Ms. Baker notes that the Psoriasis Foundation will also continue to focus on providing high caliber patient education services this year, with special attention paid to providing more programs and information to patients with psoriatic arthritis.

Much activity is afoot on the legislative action front as well, notes Ms. Baker. “We want Congress to pass the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Cure, and Care Act (PPARCCA), which was spearheaded by the Psoriasis Foundation and its advocates.” The bill sheds light on the seriousness of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis and advances the nation’s efforts to find cures for these diseases.

Another item on the Psoriasis Foundation’s legislative agenda is the appropriation of money for psoriasis patient data collection at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “In 2009, Congress approved $1.5 million in initial funding for the federal government to begin collecting public health information on psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis,” says Ms. Baker. “National Psoriasis Foundation and its advocates are working to ensure the funding for this data collection effort will continue.”

TAKE-HOME TIPS
As National Psoriasis Awareness Month approaches, Ms. Baker reminds that treating psoriasis is an important step in any patient’s overall health. “The National Psoriasis Foundation emphasizes that physicians remember that psoriasis is a serious autoimmune disease that requires lifelong care and treatment.” Per the Foundation’s Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (available on the organization’s website), all patients have the right to clear skin from treatments with the least amount of side effects. According to the National Psoriasis Foundation, a strong doctor-patient relationship is a key component to proper disease management. “Both patients and health care providers share the responsibility,” notes Ms. Baker.


For more on developments in psoriasis research and therapy, see the latest installment of the DermTube Journal Club, featuring Jerry Bagel, MD, at: DermTube.com/series/dermjournalclub/psoriasis-guidelines-and-clinical-pearls/