

Patient Advocacy and The United States Congress

Geno J. Merli, MD, FACP

Over the past 30 years multiple trials have been completed evaluating the prevention of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism in surgical and medical populations. The initial studies were focused on surgical patients utilizing a placebo controlled design. It became evident that surgical patients receiving deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolism prophylaxis had a statistically significant reduction in mortality and morbidity. Yet despite this data, venous thromboembolic (VTE) prophylaxis is not universally practiced.

In the last 10 years a number of studies have evaluated the hospitalized medically ill population. Placebo controlled trials were again part of the evaluation of this patient group. These studies documented the efficacy and safety of VTE prophylaxis in hospitalized medically ill patients. With this information three national and international registries were completed revealing that over 40% of hospitalized medically ill patients with multiple risk factors did not receive VTE prophylaxis.

It appears from the above points that clinicians either do not believe the literature or there are barriers to implementation of VTE prophylaxis. The DVT Coalition was established to raise health care professional, public, and governmental awareness of the deep vein thrombosis and its associated comorbidities. A three fold approach was adopted by the Coalition to place DVT into the consciousness of the United States population. The first step was to obtain a Senatorial Proclamation declaring March as DVT Awareness Month. This was accomplished through Senators Spector (R-Pa) and Dorgan (D-North Dakota). In addition a similar proclamation was obtained in the States of Pennsylvania and New Jersey through Senators Mello (D-Pa) and Kyrillos (R-NJ). Step 2 was to engage the Office of the Surgeon General with the goal of raising governmental awareness and ultimately a Call to Action. The latter will be announced in January 2007. The third step was to engage multiple national professional organizations as well as the National Quality Forum and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The latter organizations will provide the framework for implementing DVT prevention into every hospital across the country beginning in 2008. Finally Melanie Bloom whose husband David died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism at the age of 39 while covering the war in Iraq as an NBC correspondent became the Coalition's National Spokesperson. Through such a tragedy Melanie Bloom has committed herself to raising DVT awareness to prevent such events in others.

This presentation will review in more detail the strategy and processes for the developing a national approach to raising public awareness for the prevention of VTE.