



The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research Response to Media Coverage of *New England Journal of Medicine* study: “Bone Density Testing Interval and Transition to Osteoporosis in Older Women,” (Gourlay et. al., NEJM, Jan 19, 2012)

ASBMR Clarifies Misinterpretations of Recommendations Regarding Bone Density Testing for Women

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The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research is the World's Leading Scientific Organization for Bone Health Research

WASHINGTON, January 31, 2012 – News coverage of a recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) on bone density testing may have inadvertently led to confusion about the recommended frequency and use of an important tool used to diagnose osteoporosis – one of the most serious conditions women may face in their lifetime.

In some cases, the coverage of the study recommendations about how frequently older women should receive bone density scans may have led some women to believe these tests may not be necessary at all. In sharp contrast, preventive screening for bone health should be considered a key part of every woman's preventive health plan—just as a mammogram is for breast health.

As a scientific society, we must both produce important bone health research and accurately and clearly interpret scientific findings for the public and the medical community. Collectively, we have spent decades understanding the science behind bone health, as well as the recommendations for the use of technologies, medications and other tools to diagnose, prevent and treat bone conditions and diseases.

The recent study suggested that women age 65 and older whose first bone density test is normal can safely wait as long as 15 years before having a second test. This is good news for post-menopausal women with good or mildly low bone density – yet the researchers caution that *fewer than half* of U.S. women over 65 fall into this category. And even for those women, other risk factors must be considered. ASBMR believes it is important that women and their medical practitioners understand that bone density testing is recommended for:

- Women who have experienced any fracture at age 45 or older.
- Women with a family history of hip fractures, or other bone-related disease, who should begin getting tested for osteoporosis at age 50.
- Women who have already been diagnosed with low bone density or osteoporosis. The frequency of bone density testing is based on the level of bone density and the presence of other risk factors (generally every two years).
- All women over 65. Although Medicare covers bone density testing as a preventive benefit, only 13 percent of Medicare-eligible women receive a baseline screening test.



What was also missed in recent media coverage of the NEJM study is the fact that the recommendations for future screenings were based on results for women who received a baseline screening at age 65. The sad reality is that only 13 percent of woman age 65 on Medicare are actually getting that baseline screening, which means the other 87 percent do not and will not know if they are at risk until they break a bone.

At least 10 million Americans currently suffer from osteoporosis and another 34 million more have low bone mass, making them more susceptible to osteoporosis. Without intervention, one in two women and one in four men age 50 and above will experience a fracture due to osteoporosis. Many individuals – men and women – don't even know they are at risk for the disease.

Osteoporosis has serious health and financial consequences – in fact, one in five seniors who break a hip die within one year from complications related to the break. In 2005, osteoporosis was responsible for an estimated two million fractures and \$19 billion in costs. By 2025, experts predict that osteoporosis will be responsible for approximately three million fractures and \$25.3 billion in costs each year.

ASBMR believes that sustained investment in research and prevention efforts can reduce the physical and economic cost of osteoporosis.

For more information or to schedule an interview with an ASBMR expert, please contact Sara Knoll at sknoll@burnesscommunications.com or (301)652-1558 or Doug Fesler at dfesler@asbmr.org or (202) 367-1161.

About ASBMR: *The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research (ASBMR) is the leading professional, scientific and medical society established to bring together clinical and experimental scientists involved in the study of bone and mineral metabolism. The ASBMR has a membership of nearly 4,000 physicians, basic research scientists, and clinical investigators from around the world.*

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