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PAIN RELIEF IS A HUMAN RIGHT

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For centuries, medical and surgical treatment has emphasized saving the life of the patient rather than ameliorating the patient's pain, particularly when there were few options for the latter. Today at the dawn of the 21st century, the best available evidence indicates a major gap between an increasingly understanding of the pathophysiology of pain and widespread inadequacy of its treatment. Epidemiologic evidence has proven that chronic pain is a widespread public health issue. Studies of cancer patients' pain control consistently reveal that up to half of patients receive inadequate analgesia and 30% do not receive appropriate drugs for their pain. Equally, for patients suffering HIV/AIDS, 60%-100% will experience pain at some stage in their illness. In the developed world, this gap has prompted a series

of declarations and actions by national and international bodies advocating better pain control. One response to the worldwide undertreatment of pain has been to promote the concept that pain relief is a public health issue of such critical importance as to constitute an international imperative and fundamental human right. The importance of pain relief as the core of the medical ethic is clear. Pain clinicians promote the status of pain management beyond that of appropriate clinical practice or even an ethic of good medicine. They advocate a paradigm shift in the medical professions' perspective on pain management, from simply good practice to an imperative founded on patient rights.

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