NAON Position Statement on Osteoporosis and Bone Health

Issue: The incidence of osteoporosis, a disease characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of bone tissue leading to increased risk of fracture, is rising along with the costs related to medical care and loss of productivity associated with increasing fracture rates. The call to action and challenges of responding to the osteoporosis epidemic has been outlined in Bone Health and Osteoporosis: A Report of the Surgeon General (U S Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). Key stakeholders have been slow in responding to the Surgeon General's recommendations to increase awareness of effective strategies for preventing and treating osteoporosis (National Coalition for Osteoporosis and Related Bone Disease, 2008). In addition, recognition of fragility fractures as "red flags" signaling the indication for bone health screening and treatment when indicated has not become the standard of care as recommended by the surgeon general. Screening and management of osteoporosis following a fracture occurs in only 20.7% (National Committee for Quality Assurance, 2010). Osteoporosis-related fractures cost our health care system over $19 billion each year (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, 2008). Early diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis can dramatically reduce fracture rates, generate substantial savings and improve the quality of life of millions of Americans (Dell, Greene, Schelkun, & Williams, 2008).

Position: The National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses (NAON) supports the development and implementation of programs which focus on bone health and osteoporosis related education, prevention and research, which would allow for educational outreach to nurses, patients, and other health care providers. This includes actions such as referring first time fragility fracture patients for osteoporosis diagnostic testing and treatment and including the FRAX assessment in musculoskeletal assessments. Additionally, NAON supports the development of comprehensive bone health, osteoporosis and related bone disease surveillance and prevention programs, and expanded research activities for osteoporosis prevention and treatment. Furthermore, NAON recognizes these efforts are best implemented in partnership with other interested stakeholders. Consequently NAON supports membership in The U.S. Bone and Joint Initiative and organizational alliance with Own The Bone™.

Background: Ten million individuals in the United States, 80 percent of whom are women, are estimated to have osteoporosis and almost 34 million more are estimated to have low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for the disease (National Osteoporosis Foundation, 2011). The population of individuals with and/or at risk for osteoporosis is 55% of the people 50 years of age and older in the U.S (NOF, 2011). Registered nurses comprise a large portion of this population as the average age of a nurse is 44.5 years and over 92 % of nurses are women (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2009). Caucasian and Asian women have the highest risk (20%) for osteoporosis and African American women have a 10% risk. An estimated 1.5 million people suffer an osteoporosis-related fracture each year. This number is projected to double by 2025. One half of women and one-quarter of all men will suffer an osteoporosis related fracture in their lifetime. Twenty percent of the women and thirty percent of the men who sustain a hip fracture will die within one year of the fracture. (Burge, Dawson-Hughes, Solomon, Wong, King, & Tosteson, 2007). In summary, osteoporosis is a major public health threat.

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