

# Tame the Pain

**Jerry Lewis is keynote speaker for American Society of Pain Management Nurses' national conference.**

by Lisa Waterman Gray - Kansas City Nursing News - March 2003

Jerry Lewis, internationally renowned comedian, entertainer, celebrity advocate and chronic pain sufferer for 37 years, was keynote speaker for the American Society of Pain Management Nurses' national conference, which was held from Feb. 20 to 23 at the Westin Crown Center, in Kansas City, Mo.

Medtronic Inc. – creator of a neurostimulation device used by Lewis to alleviate his chronic pain – sponsored his appearance.

Chronic pain results in 40 million doctor visits, 515 million lost workdays and \$100 billion in medical expenses each year. It can lead to difficulty holding a job, low self-esteem, strained relationships and depression.

Lewis injured his spine during a pratfall, in 1965, which caused him daily and, finally, debilitating pain. More than three decades and many pain prescriptions, shots and therapies later, he found relief through implantation of a 'pain pacemaker' created by Medtronic. The device sends mild electrical impulses to the spine that block pain signals sent to the brain. Today, instead of pain, Lewis feels only a mild tingling sensation.

"The adrenaline rush never allowed me to hurt when I was on my boat, or in front of an audience, but the moment the curtain came down I was crippled," Lewis said in an interview following his address. "You lose your sanity and your ability to be civil. You lose a lot of social contact because you don't feel like it. My nine-year-old daughter's mere presence helped me stay alive.

"I had traveled the world to find relief. In eight days, I went to Tokyo, Stockholm, Melbourne, London and Paris, and I was shot down every time. I didn't want to stay alive. The day I took a gun out of the drawer was the scariest of my life.

"My daughter saw the gun and told me not to do it," Lewis said. "I had already called my friend, Dr. (Michael) DeBakke, to tell him what I planned to do. He asked me to wait an hour because he wanted somebody to come see me.

"Pain specialist, Dr. Joseph Schifini, came and put the stimulator on my back with a makeshift battery and pacemaker. I stood up and got 100-percent relief. After I had the (implantation) procedure, I went home and realized I'd just had a miracle. I had revision surgery about six or seven days later, on April 20.

Lewis now speaks on behalf of Medtronic's public education initiative, "Tame the Pain," which seeks to connect chronic pain sufferers with pain specialists.

"On the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> I was fidgeting and my wife asked, 'Why can't you enjoy this,' I asked her how I could enjoy it knowing that 75 million people still had pain," Lewis said. "I approached Medtronic to volunteer to help and they insisted on paying me to be a spokesperson.

"The campaign was launched in New York, Nov. 5, 2003. I'm an advocate, cheerleader and torch holder. It feels wonderful.

"I've done 100 one-on-one interviews in an 11-day period. And I've convinced Mike Wallace (from CBS News "60 Minutes") to do a whole hour on chronic pain."

Additional conference topics included assessment and management of pain for older adults with dementia; how interventional devices help chronic and cancer pain patients; complementary and alternative approaches to pain management; how to understand and manage chronic pain; what's new in anti-inflammatory medications; and clinical efficacy of ELA-Max® in the pediatric emergency department.

Lewis has agreed to bring his wit and wisdom to next year's conference, as well.

"I have lived 52 years with the medical community and I know how underappreciated nurses are," Lewis said. "A nurse understands that I look at her awestruck because of what I know she does and is."

For more information about "Tame the Pain," call (866) 617- PAIN or visit [www.tamethepain.com](http://www.tamethepain.com).