Leading Medical Societies Team Up to Encourage the Public to RETHINK VARICOSE VEINS

by Robert Rajalingam

As a member of an industry dedicated to providing medical solutions for better patient outcomes, it is disheartening to know that despite the high prevalence of venous disease, including varicose veins and chronic venous insufficiency (CVI), the vast majority of people with the condition do not adequately address their condition. Many are simply not aware that minimally invasive treatments exist that can offer relief of symptoms and potentially stop the progression into CVI.

Often, we hear from physicians that many patients who suffer from varicose veins don’t recognize the potential seriousness of their condition and misunderstand it as a cosmetic concern they can ignore or put off addressing. Or, patients may hold the outdated notion that vein stripping is the only option available, leading them to avoid visiting a vein specialist due to fear of cost, pain or complications related to treatment. Primary care physicians may not fully understand all aspects of the disease and, for instance, support hose will be prescribed to manage the patient’s symptoms, although we know they don’t truly treat varicose veins.¹

This all contributes to a greater volume of untreated venous disease than you may realize. In fact, of the more than 30 million Americans with varicose veins or CVI, only 1.9 million seek treatment each year²,³,⁴—even though today there are a number of minimally-invasive treatments available that may be covered by many insurance plans. That’s a huge population of people who may not recognize that the condition they suffer from can have a significant impact on their health and quality of life if left untreated.

It’s Time to Rethink Varicose Veins

The Rethink Varicose Veins campaign was established with the goal of helping to close this gap in knowledge and treatment, with three leading medical societies joining together for this cause: The Society for Vascular Surgery, The American Venous Forum and The American College of Phlebology. Renowned vascular surgeon Julianne Stoughton, MD, FACS, is one campaign supporter who stands behind this goal. She has said she agrees that the time is ripe for an educational campaign to help elevate awareness among patients and encourage that important dialogue with a vein...
specialist to ensure that the right questions are being asked and that the patient receives proper diagnosis and potential treatment of varicose veins and CVI.

While we know that vein specialists are quite aware of the possible complications of untreated varicose veins—and their potential to progress into the more serious form of venous disease, CVI—anecdotal feedback indicates that patients aren’t educated about this when they walk into their general practitioner’s office.

The need for consumer education in this space is the driving force behind the Rethink Varicose Veins campaign. To change the tide in patient attitudes and guide them to vein specialists before their condition progresses, Rethink Varicose Veins will promote information about varicose veins and CVI, the progressive nature of venous disease, as well as current treatment options.

In the early stages of the campaign’s development, focus group testing was conducted to determine the messages that would most resonate with people who have varicose veins and encourage them to take action. Focus group participants in general were not aware of the potential for varicose veins to progress, and they welcomed further education on the topic. Several campaign name and logo ideas were also tested with the target patient demographic to ensure that the campaign collateral would truly make an impact and cause people to rethink varicose veins.

**Educational Materials for Patients**

The website www.RethinkVaricoseVeins.com has been developed to serve as a hub for this educational information. On the site, patients can:

- Learn more about varicose veins and CVI, including the underlying medical cause, risk factors, and risks associated with delayed treatment.
- Take a quiz to dispel common myths about varicose veins, such as the belief that veins are simply a cosmetic problem.
- Read about minimally-invasive and surgical treatment options.
- Complete a self-assessment to determine whether they should see a vein specialist for further evaluation.
- Locate a vein specialist in their area. This database is open to any vein specialist who wishes to include their contact information. You are encouraged to visit the website to add your information or update it as needed if you are already included.

This website is available to the public now, and this year the campaign will continue to expand by reaching patients in person at targeted events and activities in select local markets as well as through national media.

While patient education is the core of the Rethink Varicose Veins campaign, we also recognize that it’s important for vein specialists and referring physicians to be aware of the initiative before a broader wave of outreach to consumers takes place.

Hence, the campaign launched at this year’s VEITHsymposium, where booth visitors were able to view the website and its physician locator tool as well as a patient brochure. The campaign information at the exhibit booth was very well received, and physicians were especially impressed with the three coalition societies, whose stature and outreach to both patients and the medical community will be influential in helping elevate the discourse about varicose veins.

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Another key component of the campaign will be outreach to the referring physician community. As you know, OB-GYNs, podiatrists and general practitioners often have the first opportunity to notice their patients’ varicose veins or signs and symptoms of CVI and can recommend a referral to a vein specialist if they are properly informed about the need to do so.

**What You Can Do**

The campaign offers a number of tools for vein specialists to enhance dialogue with patients and referring physicians about varicose veins and CVI. There are two key ways you can become involved in and benefit from the Rethink Varicose Veins campaign:

1. First, visit www.RethinkVaricoseVeins.com and add your information to the physician locator so that potential patients in your area will find you if they are seeking care for their varicose veins. If you are already included in this database, you can visit the site to manage your profile and update your contact information as needed.

2. Second, download the electronic toolkit available on the site to help spread the word to your existing and potential patients. The toolkit contains materials and language you can use in your practice to encourage patients to learn more about varicose veins, visit the campaign website and seek diagnosis and treatment. The toolkit contains:
   - A downloadable e-flyer that you can email to your databases or print to drive in-office awareness; also consider sharing this with referring physicians in your area for use in their offices, and add your contact information to the flyer
   - Banner ads that can be posted to your practice website that link back to the campaign website
   - Suggested Rethink Varicose Veins website copy to consider using on your practice website and posts and tweets for your practice Facebook and Twitter pages
   - A link to resources available from the American Venous Forum if you are interested in hosting a screening event

Your support of the Rethink Varicose Veins mission will be central to its success. Together with the Society for Vascular Surgery®, American Venous Forum and American College of Phlebology, we can help those who suffer from varicose veins and chronic venous insufficiency to understand they have a health concern worthy of medical diagnosis and treatment by a qualified vein specialist.

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**New Educational Campaign Helps Patients Seek Treatment for Varicose Veins**

The Society for Vascular Surgery®, the American Venous Forum and the American College of Phlebology have joined forces to get patients to Rethink Varicose Veins and seek diagnosis and treatment before their condition progresses.

Visit www.RethinkVaricoseVeins.com to:

1. Sign up for a physician locator so your information can be shared with patients in your local area seeking diagnosis and treatment
2. Download an electronic toolkit of materials you can use to encourage existing and potential patients to learn more about varicose veins and CVI and come to you for further evaluation

Robert Rajalingam is Vice President of Global Marketing, Covi-dien Vascular Therapies, sponsor of the Rethink Varicose Veins campaign.

**References**


*Statistics based on individuals over the age of 40.*