

Welcome to Today's Medical Education Program!

- I am pleased to be here with you on behalf of Merck & Co., Inc. who is sponsoring this medical education program.
- The program you are participating in is not an accredited Continuing Medical Education program.
- The information presented throughout the program will be consistent with FDA guidelines.



DR. CHARLES CEFALU'S INSIGHTS ON ZOSTER

My colleagues and I expect that the number of cases of zoster that we see in our practice will increase as the population ages. In the United States, approximately 1 million cases of zoster are diagnosed a year. There's not only a growing number of patients over 60 thanks to the aging baby boom population, but elderly patients are living longer, and living with other chronic illnesses that tax their immune systems and put them even more at risk for zoster and its complications.

Zoster symptoms can include significant pain and discomfort. Additionally, though for most people the pain of zoster lessens as the rash heals, zoster can progress into postherpetic neuralgia, (PHN) which can result in some of the most excruciating pain a person can experience.

PHN patients may require narcotics to manage the unrelenting pain. They can become depressed and require anti-depressants, which can produce complicating side effects and other drug interactions, especially if the patients are being treated for co-morbid illnesses—which they often are.

I've had patients forced to quit working because of the pain and multiple medications that can seriously compromise the ability to work and live a productive life.

As family physicians, I think it's becoming more important for us to understand that many millions of people in the United States are becoming increasingly at risk for zoster as they age. It's time for us to be more alert to the potential for zoster when elderly patients present with nondescript pain, because early diagnosis and treatment with antivirals can help reduce the duration of both the acute and chronic pain of zoster.