

**Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities  
Association  
GPDA**

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**Press Release**

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**Johnny Cash's struggles with diabetes may have led to a disabling and mysterious stomach disorder.**

The passing of Johnny Cash will have an impact on so many. His music was dearly loved and he will remain a country western music icon.

His passing, too, brings to light the plight of many other folks who suffer with a mysterious digestive disease resulting from diabetes. It is well known that Johnny Cash had suffered with diabetes for several decades. During his recent appearance on the Larry King Live Show he discussed complications from his long-standing diabetes, a condition called diabetic autonomic neuropathy, which, through damage to the autonomic nervous system, can play havoc with heart rate and lead to excessive sweating and digestive abnormalities.

When this disorder affects the stomach, it is a condition known as **gastroparesis diabeticorum**. "Gastroparesis, or delayed stomach emptying, is not an uncommon disorder by any means," says Jeanne Keith-Ferris, president of the Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities Association (GPDA). "Patients tell us that when they develop this stomach condition as a result of some other disease such as diabetes, scleroderma, AIDS, or Parkinson's disease, it is about the worst thing imaginable."

Why? Many of these patients experience years of constant vomiting and, as a result slowly deteriorate. There is probably nothing worse than daily bouts of nausea and vomiting, and yet, that is what patients with gastroparesis face on a regular basis. They are disabled because of their unrelenting symptoms. Yet, some diabetics can have very delayed gastric emptying and not suffer with these terrible symptoms. "That is one of the puzzles with this stomach disorder," says Ms. Keith-Ferris. Instead of vomiting, they may get a backup of pressure from the stomach, which can lead to acid reflux disease. Acid reflux disease, in

turn, can create problems of its own; pneumonia, for instance, can result from stomach contents washing up into the lungs while the patient is sleeping.

Dr. Thomas Abell of the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi probably sees more gastroparesis patients than anyone. His practice has been devoted to this disabling digestive disorder for over 15 years. He has worked hard to find better treatment approaches for this long-suffering group of patients. His job, like other gastroenterologists who specialize in this group of digestive diseases, is challenging since precious few treatment options exist for gastroparesis, which is both under-recognized and under funded for research. Yet, the patients don't go away or stop dying. The mortality rate is equal to that of SARS.

"We are trying to change that," says Ms. Keith-Ferris, "our non-profit association has just released a White Paper to every congressman in order to educate them about gastroparesis and the other related digestive diseases. Very little money exists in the private sector to help stimulate research. The medical crisis faced by this group of patients will need government leadership and funding to kick-start the desperately needed research. In the United States, you can literally count on one hand the number of treatment options for people suffering with this potentially lethal stomach problem."

Our patient group is saddened by the passing of Johnny Cash. He will be remembered and loved by his fans the world over.