

Chronic pain should be considered a disease

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The concept that chronic pain is a disease in its own right is leading to new specific treatments aimed at physical, psychological, and environmental components of this major disease, including genetic predisposition, according to a world renowned pain medicine expert.

Michael J Cousins AM, MD, DSc, professor and director of the Pain Management Research Institute at the University of Sydney, Royal North Shore Hospital, in Australia, presented the Decade of Pain plenary session on February 14, 2008, at the 24th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Pain Medicine at the Gaylord Palms in Orlando, Florida.

“Chronic pain is different from acute pain,” explained Dr. Cousins. “If pain persists despite reasonable treatment from a primary care physician and other specialists, the advice of a pain medicine specialist should be sought. The earlier such help is obtained the greater the chance of returning to a reasonable range of life activities.”

According to the National Center for Health Statistics more than one-quarter of Americans (26%) age 20 years and over - or, an estimated 76.5 million Americans - report that they have had a problem with pain. Studies from the Pain Management Research Institute reveal an annual cost of \$1.85 billion per 1 million people.

“In the near future, diagnosis and treatment of persistent pain will be markedly different,” Dr. Cousins stated. “Drugs such as morphine that provide only symptomatic relief will be replaced by or supplemented

with a new generation of therapies targeted at the disease process.”

The availability of new treatments may challenge the medical system. Dr. Cousins noted that too few pain medicine specialists are being trained and not enough pain patients have access to effective treatments.

“Pain management needs to become a fundamental human right: a bundle of initiatives will be needed in Medicine, Law, Ethics, Politics,” concluded Dr. Cousins.

Dr. Cousins also addressed the genetics of pain and brain imaging research.

Dr. Cousins has been the driving force in Australia, as well as internationally, in drawing attention to evidence that shows that severe persistent pain becomes a “disease entity” and has also championed the concept of pain relief as a basic human right.

Source: American Academy of Pain Medicine

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