

New study taps into genetics of spinal pain

July 16 2014, by David Ellis

Pain researchers at the University of Adelaide have launched a new study to investigate the underlying reasons why some sufferers of spinal injury have persistent pain and others don't.

People from South Australia and New South Wales who have suffered a spinal cord injury are sought for the study.

Speaking ahead of National Pain Week (21-27 July), Associate Professor Mark Hutchinson from the University's School of Medical Sciences says chronic [pain](#) develops in almost two-thirds of spinal cord injury patients.

"The reason why some patients develop [chronic pain](#) and others don't remains unknown," Associate Professor Hutchinson says.

"For people who've had a spinal cord injury, there currently does not appear to be one common factor that links one group over the other.

"This is why our study is delving further, examining each individual's genetics and comparing with their medical circumstances, to see if there are common elements at work," he says.

Associate Professor Hutchinson says pain is a much more complex and individual issue than originally thought, and sometimes the drugs given to treat pain can actually make pain worse in the long run.

"It's possible that a person's genetics and their exposure to pain and other

medicines might be contributing to their ongoing pain problems. This is why it's really important for our study to have spinal cord injury patients who have [persistent pain](#) as well as those who don't, to help us understand if this relationship exists."

Associate Professor Hutchinson says this study offers some hope to those with a spinal cord injury.

"In 5-10 years time, it could mean that if someone has a suspected spinal cord injury, a tissue sample could be analysed for their key genetic code, so that a treatment can be customised to their specific genetic needs. In this way, it might be possible to avoid long-term pain consequences," he says.

Volunteers from South Australia and New South Wales with spinal cord injury are sought for this study.

More information: To find out more or to take part in the study, members of the public should call: 1 800 009 897.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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