



The Australian Pain Society

2018  
*Distinguished  
Member  
Award*

Awarded for services to the promotion,  
treatment and science of pain management  
and lifelong contribution to the  
Australian Pain Society.

Professor Michael Nicholas is a clinical psychologist who has an outstanding record of achievement in multidisciplinary pain management, pain education and psychosocial pain research. He is indeed a most worthy recipient of the Distinguished Member of the Australian Pain Society Award.

Since 1980, Professor Nicholas has combined research and clinical pain practice, especially multidisciplinary applications of psychology. Michael started his academic career in his home of New

Zealand, with a Bachelor of Science at the University of Otago in 1972, majoring in Zoology, which provided him with his only opportunity so far to learn the demanding skills of taxidermy. He then went on to commence studies in psychology at the University of Auckland, where he attained his MSc with Honours. He then crossed the ditch and came to Sydney, where he completed his MPsychol (Clin) at the University of New South Wales in 1980.

Michael's interest in pain was evident at this early time, completing his PhD in 1988 on *An Evaluation of Treatments for Chronic Low Back Pain* supervised by Dr Peter Wilson at the University of Sydney. As part of his PhD, Michael established the first Back Pain Program at Westmead Hospital, together with physiotherapist Jocelyn Goyen. He also developed a questionnaire to evaluate pain-related self-efficacy (PSEQ), which has been translated into 50 languages around the world and is widely used in clinical practice and research in pain management. The beginning of Michael's commitment to the roles of scientist-practitioner-teacher, can perhaps be traced back to these early days.



## Michael Nicholas

BSc, MSc (Hons), MPsychol (Clin),  
PhD, MAPS, FFPMANZCA

After completing his PhD, Michael travelled to London, where he was appointed the inaugural Director of INPUT Multidisciplinary Pain Management Program at St Thomas' Hospital. It was here in 1988 that he developed this program, the first CBT inpatient program in the UK, in collaboration with Doug Justins, Charles Pither and other colleagues. With a grant from Kings Fund to support the development of INPUT and to fund a randomised

controlled trial, he compared inpatient and outpatient CBT programs with usual care. The INPUT program and the multidisciplinary team who ran it with Michael, played major roles in the development of pain management services in the UK and Europe since its inception in 1988. One wonders whether Michael realised at that time what an enormous impact this seminal program was also to have on the future of pain management not only in the UK, but also in countries on the other side of the world. His years spent living in London were also rich with travel, culture and an opportunity to watch rugby at Cardiff Arms Park.

In 1990 Michael took up his first academic appointment, as a Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, where he started his role as a clinical educator, training clinical psychologists with a focus on pain management. In 1994 Michael was approached by Professor Michael Cousins to take up a conjoint position at the University of Sydney (Faculty of Medicine-Northern Clinical School) and the Pain Management Research Institute (PMRI) at Royal

North Shore Hospital. It was here that Michael recruited staff to establish the ADAPT pain management program, based on the success of INPUT. Since commencing in late 1994, more than 300 programs have been run to date, improving the quality of life for so many patients whose lives have been shattered by severe, persisting pain.

In addition to clinical service delivery at RNSH, Michael became involved in the development of the Master's program in Pain Management at the University of Sydney, which started in 1996 and has grown into an internationally recognised online graduate pain education program for all health disciplines. Michael has been Director of the program since 2013, when Phil Siddall stepped down to establish the pain service at Greenwich Hospital in Sydney. In recognition of his contributions to Education in Pain Medicine, Professor Nicholas was awarded an honorary Fellowship by the Faculty of Pain Medicine, Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (FFPMANZCA) in 2009 and is the only psychologist to have received this honour.

Since completing his PhD in 1988, Michael has sustained an amazingly productive clinical research program focussing on various aspects of pain management and mechanisms. This has included multiple trials funded by major grant bodies such as the NHMRC. His collaborators have included leading Australian pain researchers such as Professor Chris Maher and Professor Louise Sharpe.

Michael is also recognised as an international leader in the investigation of psychosocial contributors to persisting pain and predictors of pain outcomes. Notably, his collaboration with Professor Steve Linton at Örebro University in Sweden, led to the development and testing of the Örebro Musculoskeletal Pain Screening Questionnaire, now widely used in clinical practice around the

world to predict occupational outcomes. Michael's extensive program of research clearly reflects his lifelong passion for and experience with clinical delivery of multidisciplinary pain management.

Following on from decades of leadership in occupational rehabilitation in Australia, Michael recently completed ground-breaking research to demonstrate highly valuable outcomes from an early, coordinated psychosocial intervention for injured workers at risk of delayed recovery. Funded by a large industry grant, this Work Injury Screening and Early Intervention (WISE) study was a novel collaboration between employers, insurers, health care providers and injured workers. The NSW Ministry of Health has now implemented the protocol of this intervention for injured health workers across NSW public hospitals. He maintains strong links with international collaborators in this area including UK Professor Chris Main and US Professor Bill Shaw.

Michael has published over 170 scientific papers, with an h-index of 42. His research has been published in prestigious journals such as *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Pain*, *Brain*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Experimental Brain Research* and *Clinical Journal of Pain*. He has published 56 book chapters on psychological aspects of pain in the past 5 years, as well as a self-management book for chronic pain sufferers: *Manage Your Pain: ABC Books* that has been translated into several languages.

Professor Nicholas has a long-term commitment to the translation and implementation of high quality clinical research for clinicians, patients, and the wider community, nationally and internationally. He actively contributes to training clinicians from all health disciplines in the application of empirically-supported psychologically-based interventions in pain management. This includes web-based and face-to-face training in many countries, as well as developing broader community-level support

programs for people in pain. He worked with Dr Mary Cardosa to successfully establish the first multidisciplinary pain program in Malaysia, and also with Dr PP Chen in Hong Kong. Michael is a member of the Executive of the NSW Pain Network, Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI) since its establishment in 2012 (and since 2015, Co-Chair for this state-wide body established by NSW Ministry of Health). His most recent work in this regard has been assisting different community language groups to develop culturally relevant pain self-management programs, as well as innovative ways of improving access to multidisciplinary pain management in community settings, both rural and urban.

Michael has been very active internationally through multiple roles with the IASP since 1987. He was a member of the IASP Council from 2010-2016. Since that time he has been elected to a leadership role as Secretary of the IASP, commencing his 2-year term following the World Congress on Pain at the end of September 2016. He is involved in training young pain clinicians in South East Asia through biennial IASP Pain Camps, working with colleagues throughout the region. Michael has served on multiple IASP Taskforces and Committees. He is currently Associate Editor of *PAIN, Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* and the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain*. During his IASP Council representation Michael has also been a valuable resource as IASP Liaison to the APS Board. Passionate about pain education, it is no surprise that Michael is also actively involved in the current 2018 IASP Global Year for Excellence in Pain Education.

A longstanding member of the APS since 1992, Michael always graciously accepts the APS Board's requests for him to represent the APS, and pain management in general, on various government and peer organisation committees and steering groups. He was also a key contributor to the development of the National Pain Strategy.

In addition to delivering the APS Bonica lecture in Brisbane in 2015, Michael always contributes to our annual scientific meetings, presenting plenary sessions and contributing to workshops. He also actively encourages his colleagues to engage with our ASM, always striving to share pain education and research as widely as possible.

In 2012, Michael was promoted to Professor at The University of Sydney and in 2015 he was awarded an Honorary PhD at Örebro University in Sweden in recognition of his continuing contributions to collaborative pain research with researchers at that University.

Michael was born in Christchurch and lived his early life in a small farming community in North Canterbury where his father was the local GP. He spent most of his life prior to coming to Sydney in Auckland. At boarding school, he excelled academically and artistically, as well as in rugby, athletics and eating large meals. He remains a fully committed *All Blacks* fan, even when they are playing the Wallabies. He is married to Fiona, has two adult sons, and is devoted to his family. They report that engaging him in conversations and activities that are not related to pain remain a work in progress. He reads widely about politics and current events in Australia and internationally.

It is sometimes wondered whether Michael has secretly cloned himself, as the sheer volume of work that he does - whether clinical, research, education or professional - could surely not be achieved by one person. Michael is a tireless champion for those who suffer from pain. His persistent dedication and achievements are greatly respected by his colleagues in the APS and beyond.

We heartily congratulate him on this APS Distinguished Member Award.