



THE
AUSTRALIAN
PAIN SOCIETY

www.apsoc.org.au

APS Secretariat
PO Box 637
North Sydney NSW 2059
T: 02 9016 4343
E: aps@apsoc.org.au
W: www.apsoc.org.au
Twitter: @AusPainSoc

MEDIA RELEASE

26 March 2018

HOPE FOR ONE IN FIVE CHILDREN LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN

One of the most common health problems among children and adolescents – chronic pain – will be in the spotlight at the Australian Pain Society annual scientific meeting in Sydney in April.

Dr Tiina Jaaniste, from Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick and the University of New South Wales, will chair a session on the importance of resilience and well-being in children and adolescents with chronic pain.

"We're exploring why some children with chronic pain are able to function well. This depends not only on the child's personal attributes, but on a range of factors - social, familial, school, institutional, and even cultural."

According to research, a fifth of children and adolescents suffer chronic pain, such as headache, abdominal or musculoskeletal pain. Often this may be unrelated to injury, disease or illness. Chronic pain can cause children to drop out of school, sporting and social activities and is linked to anxiety and depression.¹

Rather than focussing only on factors contributing to bad pain outcomes, Dr Jaaniste says it is important to help a child tap into their strengths, skills and the resources available to them.

"When a child or adolescent first attends a chronic pain clinic, one of the challenges is getting patients and families to accept that there may be diagnostic uncertainty associated with their chronic pain. We need them to 'buy in' to psychological therapies, alongside physical therapies," said Dr Jaaniste.

"Individual therapies are not enough to optimise a child's resilience. Parent and school interventions are also important," said Dr Jaaniste.

Identifying the personal, family and social factors that enhance or hinder a child's response to psychological strategies for managing pain is the focus of research by Dr Joanne Dudeney, based on her recent work at the Seattle Children's Research Institute.

A recent review by Dr Dudeney and her Seattle colleagues found that psychological treatments (including Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, relaxation, biofeedback) can help decrease chronic pain, disability and anxiety in young people.

"A typical patient I see might be a 14-year-old with chronic headache or abdominal pain who has dropped out of sport or dancing, has trouble sleeping, and is constantly worried about their pain," said Dr Dudeney, a clinical psychologist at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick.

"However, not everyone benefits from treatment. We are starting to investigate why some children respond better to pain management therapies than others, and the risk and resilience factors that contribute to treatment outcomes," said Dr Dudeney.

Meanwhile, Peter O’Sullivan, a Professor of Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy at Curtin University will present research on the increasing rate of lower back pain among adolescents, based on a cohort of children tracked from 14 to 22 years.

The study identifies predictors for lower back pain among adolescents, including poor mental health status, negative back pain beliefs, involvement in sports, and altered stress responses.

Professor O’Sullivan says factors previously thought to be important predictors of lower back pain – poor spinal posture, carrying school bags, joint hypermobility, and poor back muscle endurance – are not strong predictors.

“It’s commonly believed that back pain is caused by spinal damage and this has driven an increase in radiological imaging to detect pathological structures and physiotherapy treatments to correct biomechanical faults.”

“However, there is growing evidence that disabling back pain is associated with a vicious cycle of unhelpful beliefs and responses to pain. This might include the belief that pain equals harm – leading to fear, distress, protective muscle guarding, as well as avoidance of activity and movement. This in turn leads to disability and further sensitisation,” said Professor O’Sullivan.

1. King S, Chambers CT, Huguet A, MacNevin RC, McGrath PJ, Parker L, MacDonald AJ. The epidemiology of chronic pain in children and adolescents revisited: A systematic review. *Pain* 2011;152:2729–38

Media contact:

Belinda Tromp 0418 395 898

Australian Pain Society | [38th Annual Scientific Meeting](#) | 8-11 April 2018 | International Convention Centre Sydney

The Australian Pain Society (APS) is Australia’s leading forum of university-trained health professionals (including GP and specialist doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, psychologists and other allied health professionals and researchers) trained in the recognition, research, management and advocacy around all aspects of pain in Australia.