

Boost for Queensland pain sufferers

Friday June 11, 2010

Persistent pain is the third costliest health problem in Australia and the Queensland Government is leading the way in addressing it, the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) said today (Friday June 11).

In its Budget announcement on Tuesday, the Queensland Government allocated funding of \$39.1 million over four years for the staged implementation of a hub and spoke persistent pain service network across the state in metropolitan and regional areas.

“We see so many patients living with constant daily pain who are depressed, anxious, socially isolated and in failing relationships because of their pain,” said Brisbane-based pain medicine specialist, Associate Professor Leigh Atkinson who is an FPM board member.

“It is a credit to the Queensland Government that they have recognised and addressed this huge problem suffered by an estimated 576,000 Queenslanders.”

According to a 2007 Access Economics report, “The High Price of Pain”, persistent pain costs the Australian economy \$34 billion annually in lost productivity and healthcare expenditure. This equates to some \$6.8 billion in Queensland. The report said pain was the third costliest health problem after cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal conditions.

An estimated one in five Australians will at some stage in their lives have persistent pain – constant daily pain for three months or more - and this number is likely to increase as the population ages.

Dr David Jones, the Dean of the Faculty of Pain Medicine, which is responsible for training, education and standards for pain medicine in Australia and New Zealand, said more pain specialists would be needed to help address waiting lists for pain treatment in Queensland.

There are some 950 patients waiting up to 18 months to see a pain specialist at Queensland’s only dedicated pain clinic at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital where between three and four doctors were being trained in pain medicine each year, he said.

Dr Jones said the Faculty was willing and able to train more pain specialists to fill funded positions at new persistent pain services in Queensland.

Pain medicine is a multidisciplinary field of specialist medical practice that recognises that the management of severe pain problems requires the skills of more than one medical discipline.

The Faculty was established within ANZCA in 1999, incorporating true multidisciplinary representation from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) and the Australasian Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine (RACP) (AFRM RACP).

Dr Jones said the Queensland Government's Budget allocation demonstrated its strong support for the recommendations of the National Pain Strategy, released in April, following the National Pain Summit.

The Summit was led by ANZCA, FPM and the Australian Pain Society and Chronic Pain Australia in collaboration with inaugural supporters' MBF Foundation and the Pain Management Research Institute in Sydney.

To speak to Associate Professor Leigh Atkinson or a patient with persistent pain, please contact ANZCA's media manager, Clea Hincks, on 0418 583 276 or 03 9093 4917.