De-stressing the distressed: is the ICU making patients sick?

Critically ill patients are placed under enormous stress when in intensive care – coping with a mix of powerful drugs, noisy environments, intense pain, disrupted sleep and invasive tubes.

It’s hard to imagine an environment less conducive to rest and recovery.

Mervyn Singer, Professor of Intensive Care Medicine at University College London, argues the triple whammy of illness, treatment and environment in a critical care unit can cause excessive stress for a sick patient, leading to short-term and long-term physical and psychological disorders or even organ failure.

How to de-stress patients will be the focus of his talk at tomorrow’s Combined Scientific Meeting in Hong Kong of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) and the Hong Kong College of Anaesthesiologists (HKCA).

Whether by piping Mozart into hospital wards, enhancing sleep or simply doing less for patients, Professor Singer will discuss ways to improve outcomes for the critically ill.

Other highlights of Tuesday’s program include:

• International disaster responses with reference to the recent Christchurch and Japan emergencies. MedSTAR kids Clinical Director Dr Jane Cocks will look at multi-casualty aeromedical evacuation in the Asia Pacific and discuss the medical responses required in international disaster scenarios. She will outline how a coordinated international response can help provide life-saving and time-critical interventions to multiple patients without depleting local resources in the disaster zone.

• Acute pain management in the developing world. Many people in the developing world accept pain as an unavoidable part of life but Professor Roger Goucke from Perth’s Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will argue that freedom from pain should be a health goal alongside access to clean water, improving maternal and child health, and the prevention of infectious diseases. He will outline an essential pain management program developed by anaesthetists and pain specialists that emphasises low cost strategies that can markedly improve quality of life through very simple interventions.

• Professor Stephan Schug, the Director of Pain Medicine at Royal Perth Hospital, will discuss new and reformulated drugs, including tamper-proof
formulations of opioids that aim to reduce the abuse of these prescription painkillers and their diversion onto the black market.

For further information, please contact ANZCA media manager, Meaghan Shaw, on +61 408 259 369 or email mshaw@anzca.edu.au. The program and abstracts can be found here.