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New study aims to ease chronic pain

Tracking which treatments actually work for the one in five children and adults who suffer from chronic pain is the focus of a new study that hopes to improve the understanding of how we deal with pain in Australia and New Zealand.

The electronic Persistent Pain Outcomes Collaboration (ePOCC), is an initiative of the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian of New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, and is being run by the Australian Health Services Research Institute at the University of Wollongong. The aim is to compare or benchmark the treatment approaches used by pain centres across Australia and New Zealand. Start up funding for the project has come from the NSW Ministry of Health and Medical Research.

Pain medicine specialist Dr Chris Hayes said the study, which has been launched in 11 sites across NSW, will be rolled out to other states and across New Zealand in a bid to accurately document the strategies that are most effective in reducing the burden of pain.

Dr Hayes, who is a Faculty of Pain Medicine representative for ePPOC and director of the Hunter Integrated Pain Service at John Hunter Hospital in NSW, said the research would provide invaluable information on the most appropriate, timely and effective ways to treat pain by comparing patient outcomes across different facilities.

“There are very diverse treatments, even for similar conditions, and we need to find a way to capture what works well and what doesn’t,” Dr Hayes said.

The factors contributing to pain are multiple and extremely varied – there is pain triggered by illness, by injury or surgery. In addition emotional stress and lifestyle factors around the time of onset of pain or earlier in life can play a role. Any of these contributors can be addressed in developing a plan of treatment for chronic pain.

The study will collect and compare data on how a patient’s pain changes and how their function improves as they go through treatment. The initial focus will be on comparing broadly similar treatment approaches. In the future there will be the capacity to analyse response to very specific treatments.

The study will:

- * Receive and manage routinely collected patient information from public and private pain management services in Australia and New Zealand;
- * Provide regular reports to participating services;

- * Develop a national benchmarking system to improve pain management outcomes;
- and
- * Provide a framework for future research.

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