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## **Women’s chronic pain “more complex and more severe”**

Men and women should be prescribed medications and treated for pain differently according to their gender as new research establishes chronic pain in women is more complex and harder to treat than chronic pain in men, according to a leading neuroscientist.

Dr Mark Hutchinson from the school of medical sciences at the University of Adelaide will tell this weekend’s Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) spring meeting “Internal Pain is not Eternal Pain” pre-clinical studies in rodents have established for the first time that the brain’s immune cells, known as glial cells, contribute to differences in pain between the sexes.

“These studies certainly show that women’s experience of pain is more severe and the pain is harder to treat.

“There are fundamental differences in the experience of pain between men and women.”

Dr Hutchinson said his research was investigating why acute pain turned to chronic pain (pain experienced for at least three – six months) in some people and why chronic pain was more prevalent in women than in men.

“Female and male structures in the brain are different but it doesn’t explain women’s higher rate of pain,” Dr Hutchinson said ahead of the meeting.

“There is a difference in sensitivity, we know that. But rather than just sensitivity to the drug used in females there are multiple different pain systems.

“Our research is also discovering brain mechanisms at work that are proving chronic pain in women is more complex and difficult to treat than in men, despite the similarity of the initial cause of pain.”

Dr Hutchinson said understanding female chronic pain was profoundly important to treatment methods – it was already known some drugs for inflammatory bowel disease only work on women and not on men, indicating the need for more tailored treatments.

“We are hoping our research will lead to the development of more sex-targeted drugs being developed,” he said.

The discovery of the role of glial cells and their effect on the central nervous system in pain could also contribute to a cure for chronic pain in the future.

The FPM meeting begins tomorrow and runs until Sunday.

**For further information or to interview Dr Hutchinson please contact ANZCA Media Manager Ebru Yaman on +61 3 8517 5303, +61 408 259 369 or email [eyaman@anzca.edu.au](mailto:eyaman@anzca.edu.au). Follow us on Twitter [@ANZCA](https://twitter.com/ANZCA)**