

## Moves to educate GPs in pain management discussed

Friday October 8, 2010

Educating doctors about prescription painkiller addiction is just one of the facets of a new certificate for Australian GPs that has been developed by a team of doctors in South Australia.

Adelaide pain specialists Dr Tim Semple and Dr Penelope Briscoe, who is also the immediate past president of the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) and Adelaide GP Dr Stephen Leow led a team that developed GP certification in pain management and will all be speaking at the **2010 Spring Meeting of the FPM, "Transitions in Pain" (Friday October 8 – Sunday October 10)** in Newcastle.

The certification in pain management will be available from February to Fellows of the Royal Australian College of GPs and will be entitled "FRACGP(PM)". There are plans to expand its availability to all other GPs in the near future.

The concept evolved from a Federally funded pilot project five years ago that enabled interested GPs to attend outpatient sessions at Adelaide's two accredited pain management centres, and from the RACGP's Faculty of Specific Interests in General Practice.

One in five Australians have chronic pain and according to the Australian Pain Society's 2010 "Waiting in Pain" interim report, Australians are waiting an average six months to access optimum treatment at a multidisciplinary pain centre.

In SA, an estimated 75,000 patients have severe, disabling pain but Adelaide's two multi-disciplinary pain clinics (the Royal Adelaide Hospital and Flinders Medical Centre pain management units) can only see 2500 new patients a year.

"This means that a lot of the load in treating patients must fall to GPs," said Dr Semple, who will outline initiatives from the SA Collaborative Pain Project, which has a core goal of improving opioid prescribing by GPs.

One of the issues being addressed by Dr Leow, who is Chair of the RACGP's Network for Pain Management, is the lack of incentives for GPs to treat patients with chronic pain.

"People with chronic pain take longer to treat and are more difficult patients for doctors already under time restraints," Dr Leow said. "Currently, there are financial incentives to see more patients quickly rather than to take the time needed to assess someone thoroughly."

"There's no formal education for registrars in the GP training program and if doctors are interested in learning more about pain, they have to chase it up themselves.

"There is constant scrutiny of GPs who treat people with pain. The longer consults and increased opioid prescriptions are picked up by authorities, which can cause unnecessary angst."

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