

Monday October 17, 2011

## **Pain specialists tackle \$1.2 billion a year migraine headache**

Pain specialists are targeting the 3.5 million Australians who suffer from migraines, costing the community up to \$1.2 billion a year, as part of the Global Year Against Headache, which was launched today.

Faculty of Pain Medicine board member, Dr Ray Garrick, who is a Sydney neurologist, says a quarter of all Australian households have someone who suffers migraines, affecting their work and social life and costing the community in terms of lost productivity.

Migraines affect up to 15 per cent of the population – 11 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women.

The Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists is helping to promote the Global Year Against Headache, to draw attention to the work being done to alleviate migraines and other headaches.

Dr Garrick says this work includes:

- Research to determine why migraine rates are going up 1 per cent every decade.
- Research into a mutation in the TRESK gene, which disrupts the normal signalling from one nerve to the next, and appears to be a significant factor in common migraines. By targeting the gene with new drugs, researchers hope to be able to reduce or eliminate pain for migraine sufferers.
- Trials of new drugs that treat acute migraines by targeting the RAMP gene protein which regulates a neuropeptide that plays a key role in migraine headaches.

Other issues to be addressed in the Global Year Against Headache include:

- Medication overuse headaches or rebound headaches: the majority of people attending speciality headache clinics have this condition which is caused by overusing painkillers. Where once the painkiller was effective for treating the pain, the patient's headache rebounds into a more acute pain for which the best treatment is to stop taking painkillers.
- Tension-type headaches or those associated with muscle tightness or the physical or emotional stresses that are a part of modern life.
- Mixing medications: patients with migraines are treated with drugs called triptans which act on serotonin receptors. Modern anti-depressants also act on serotonin receptors and pain specialists warn there can be an adverse reaction between the two types of medication.
- Tailoring treatment: some patients can predict a headache when they comb their hair gently and it hurts; other patients have headaches associated with other painful conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or fibromyalgia. By learning

about a patient's pattern of headache, doctors can offer a broader approach to treatment.

The Global Year Against Headache is an initiative of the International Association for the Study of Pain.

- **For more information, or to interview Dr Ray Garrick, please contact ANZCA Media Manager, Meaghan Shaw, on +61 3 8517 5303, +61 408 259 369 or email [mshaw@anzca.edu.au](mailto:mshaw@anzca.edu.au).**