

Thursday May 10, 2012

Revolutionary pain service leads the way on pain relief

Fremantle's pain medicine unit, which gives patients strategies to self-manage their pain, has been so successful in its world-first approach that 50 per cent of patients decide they no longer need to see a pain specialist.

Dr Stephanie Davies, from the STEPS (Self-Training Educative Pain Sessions) program at Fremantle Hospital's Pain Medicine Unit, will outline how the program has helped patients at a Faculty of Pain Medicine meeting in Perth tomorrow.

The two-day STEPS program is revolutionary in that it delivers group education sessions to patients who are referred to the pain service prior to them having an individual appointment with a pain specialist.

The community-based program, led by pain medicine physicians, clinical psychologists, an occupational therapist and physiotherapist, provides patients with strategies to help them manage their pain themselves.

The program, which began in 2007, has been very successful – half of those who complete the program decide they no longer need an individual appointment with a pain specialist. Waiting times were reduced from 106 to 16 weeks at one pain unit and from 37 to 15 weeks at a second.

The Faculty of Pain Medicine meeting will hear from visiting and local experts on how to measure outcomes in pain medicine to better deliver pain services for suffering from chronic pain.

It is estimated that 20 per cent of the population in Australia and New Zealand suffer from chronic pain, and these numbers are expected to increase as the population ages, with more people suffering from conditions such as osteoarthritis and low back pain. In Australia, chronic pain is estimated to cost the economy \$34 billion each year.

Other speakers include:

- **President of consumer group Chronic Pain Australia, Dr Coralie Wales**, who will talk about the evolving paradigm of pain medicine towards a whole-person healing approach, with an emphasis on "healing" rather than "curing".
- **Dr Carolyn Arnold, the Director of Victoria's Caulfield Pain Management and Research Centre, and Dr Chris Hayes, the Director of Newcastle's Hunter Integrated Pain Service**, who have developed a national benchmarking project across Australia and New Zealand to set standards for pain services for people in pain.
- **Professor Alan Merry from the University of Auckland** who emphasises that often the best way to manage chronic pain is through comprehensive strategies that include education, relaxation, self-hypnosis, simple analgesics and exercise

in addition to the judicious use of interventions (such as drugs and injections) that are clearly supported by evidence.

For further information, or to attend the meetings or interview speakers, please contact ANZCA Media Manager, Meaghan Shaw, on +61 408 259 369 or email mshaw@anzca.edu.au. Please note, Perth is two hours behind AEST and four behind NZST. Follow us on Twitter [@ANZCAnews](https://twitter.com/ANZCAnews).