



Implantable medical devices -- the way of the future?

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Medicine is moving away from drugs to implantable medical devices to treat chronic diseases, an international meeting of specialist pain medicine physicians has heard.

Pain specialist Dr Nick Christelis, from Victoria, Australia, has told a pain medicine conference in Kuala Lumpur that there is a shift from the biochemical era (medications) to the bioelectrical era (using implantable medical devices) to treat chronic diseases like chronic pain.

Addressing the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) Annual Pain Medicine Symposium, Dr Christelis says it is an immensely exciting time in medicine.

"We can now treat diseases that we'd never even dreamed of treating in the past like persistent nerve (neuropathic) pain, complex regional pain syndrome, chronic pain after spinal surgeries and other surgeries. Nerve stimulation can also now be used to treat bladder and bowel dysfunction, and even some movement disorders like Parkinson's disease," he explained.

But he also sounded a note of caution.

He says it is vital that these new technologies are used wisely and carefully to enable the best possible patient outcomes and results.

"They cannot be seen as the cure for all pain diseases, that is, there is no one size fits all pain treatment. They are a tool we use in the management of these disease and should always be combined with other forms of pain therapy approaches."

As secretary of the Society of Neuromodulation for Australia and New Zealand, he used his presentation to explore the "art" of neuromodulation, which he says combines clinical expertise with experience and empathy to ensure the best possible outcomes for every single patient.

"The art is making sure that the right patient gets the right form of nerve stimulation, at the right time, for the right disease process, with the smallest possible risk."

Dr Christelis says failing to adopt new techniques is not an option.

"It would mean denying patients meaningful medical advances," he said.

However, he says with any new technique in medicine there comes risk. He says pain medicine needs to continue to question how it provides patients with the newest medical technologies but limit the risks to the patients in a profession where medical expertise must be learned on patients.

The Pain at the Interface meeting being held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre features Australian, New Zealand and international speakers presenting on a wide range of topics including opioids, chronic pain, post traumatic stress disorder and new developments in spinal cord stimulation.