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Most Australians living with chronic pain miss out on best treatment, conference hears

Eight out of 10 Australians living with chronic pain may be missing out on best-practice treatments with potentially addictive opioids still high on the “go-to” list of prescribed pain treatments, a meeting of leading specialist pain medicine physicians will be told this weekend.

According to Associate Professor Meredith Craigie, a past dean of the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), there is no national, co-ordinated approach to pain management education of health practitioners in Australia.

“More than three Australians accidentally die every day from prescription opioids alone - more than double the annual road toll.

“The tragedy is that opioids are still high on the go-to list of pain treatments commonly prescribed but up to eight out of ten Australians living with chronic pain may be missing out on best-practice pain care.”

Associate Professor Craigie is a keynote speaker at the faculty’s annual Spring Meeting which is meeting in Noosa Heads from 14 to 16 October. Nearly 100 specialist pain medicine physicians are meeting for the first time at a face-to-face event since 2019.

A specialist pain medicine physician, Associate Professor Craigie has played a key role in leading a national project to develop a national pain management education strategy for health practitioners.

The Australian Department of Health funded the faculty to develop the strategy after wide consultation with consumers, students and health practitioners from most disciplines based on extensive research of the published research and review of existing health education resources.

Associate Professor Craigie will tell the FPM Spring Meeting many people living with chronic pain are still not getting tailored care and treatment.

“The burden of pain in our society has reached crisis point with high social and economic costs estimated at nearly \$A140 billion in 2018 alone. Despite these factors, many health professionals have a limited understanding of pain science and contemporary management options.”

Associate Professor Craigie said the development of national standards for pain management in Australia for health practitioners such as medical practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, occupational therapists, Aboriginal health workers and aged care workers would go some way to ensuring Australians living with chronic pain received pain treatment appropriate for their needs.

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