



Fibromyalgia – Condition Undiagnosed?

For Immediate Release – 12th May 2004 Fibromyalgia Awareness Day

Wednesday 12th May is International Fibromyalgia Awareness Day.

Fibromyalgia is condition, which affects 2-4 % of the population in industrialised countries - approximately 600,000 Australians. However, "...despite having such important consequences for society, fibromyalgia has traditionally been poorly recognised and managed," says Dr Emma Guymer, a bone and joint specialist (rheumatologist).

Fibromyalgia is a term used to describe a 'cluster of symptoms'. The main symptoms of the condition include: widespread pain, ongoing musculoskeletal pain and tenderness. People with the condition may also experience fatigue, depression, sleep disturbances, memory problems, anxiety and distress.

A haze of misconception and confusion currently surrounds the condition, both amongst health-care professionals and the wider community. This confusion appears to stem from previous controversy regarding definition and diagnosis and has resulted in the condition not always being taken seriously.

Dr Guymer, regularly sees patients with fibromyalgia and comments, "***The failure of the health care community to completely legitimize fibromyalgia as a specific disease has led to confusion, derision and disbelief in the wider population, and the idea that these people are "putting it on."***

Fibromyalgia can coexist with other chronic illnesses such as arthritis as well other conditions which may include migraine headaches and irritable bowel syndrome. People are often unable to perform simple daily activities. The impact of these chronic and often debilitating symptoms on people's health and wellbeing is substantial.

There is no simple solution to this complex condition. Medications such as anti-depressants and drugs to stabilise cell walls (membranes), such as local anaesthetics are only one aspect of treatment, providing some relief from pain and fatigue. Medications alone however are inadequate in managing the condition in the majority of patients. A three pronged multidisciplinary management plan comprising of **drug treatment, slowly graded aerobic exercise and cognitive-behavioural therapy** is currently the preferred approach.

When all three approaches are used together Guymer says, "There appears to be a synergistic effect." However a significant drawback lies in the affordability and accessibility of trained psychologists.

Other approaches include acupuncture and a range of natural therapies. Whilst these may offer relief for some, further research is required to determine any true benefit.

Dr Daniel Lewis, a Melbourne rheumatologist, and past president of Arthritis Victoria, has founded a program to help people, "*Live well with fibromyalgia.*" The six week program is based on yoga principles. It aims to assist patients in learning how to balance the nervous and stress response systems. The classes teach techniques to manage pain, enhance energy, improve sleep and manage stress.

*The origin of International Fibromyalgia Awareness Day on May 12th stems from the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the English army nurse.
- Nightingale was often confined to bed with a painful and fatiguing illness resembling fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.*



So is there a solution to the difficult-to-diagnose condition of fibromyalgia within society? Dr Guymer advises that, 'The only way to truly address this major public health issue is through further education of health professionals, patients and the general community.'

Further information about bone and joint specialists can be found at

www.rheumatology.org.au

If you would like to arrange an interview with a bone and joint specialists or additional information please contact Fiona Landgren or Clare Burns on **(03) 9429 6728** or **0408 530 865**

Consumer information on Fibromyalgia, including contact details for fibromyalgia support groups, is available from Arthritis Victoria telephone 1800 011 041 or www.arthritisvic.org.au

