



## Press release

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### **New Study Highlights Significant Variations in Level of Pain Management Education Given to UK Students**

Education on identification, assessment and treatment of pain represents less than 1% of the university-based teaching for healthcare professionals

**London, UK: 21 October, 2009.** Survey results released today reveal that a distinct lack of time is being dedicated to educating medical and healthcare students on pain and how best to manage it in their patients. This news comes following the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) annual report published at the beginning of the year highlighting the inadequacy of current pain management systems and calling for a greater focus on improving the provision of care for those with chronic pain.

The research, carried out by the British Pain Society Education Special Interest Group, surveyed 19 universities across the UK. The questionnaire aimed to determine the nature and content of pain education in undergraduate programmes for healthcare and veterinary professionals, as well as exploring the extent of inter-professional education and the strategies used to promote learning in pain. In all, 74 survey questionnaires were returned from eight health-related disciplines and covering 108 programmes.

Dr Beverly Collett, Treasurer of the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) and Chair of the Chronic Pain Policy Coalition commented, "This survey focuses much-needed attention on the key issue of the level of pain education that our future doctors and nurses receive. With 7.8 million people living with chronic pain in the UK, it is vital that health professionals are adequately supported in gaining a comprehensive understanding of pain management. We need to ensure all our health professionals receive both the right amount and right type of pain education, and getting early professional education right is one of the crucial steps towards improving pain management services." Results reveal that while most

academics report some formal pain content in their syllabus, this is often limited and integrated across several modules – meaning education dedicated solely to pain management does not exist.

Results highlight that, on average, medical students only receive 13 hours of pain education during their five-year course, with nurses receiving 10 hours, dentists 9.5 hours, pharmacists 8 hours and midwives just 6 hours. Students studying physiotherapy were offered by far the most time on pain management, with an average of 37.5 hours allocated in the curriculum. These results are in stark contrast to the current curriculum recommendation by IASP which advises time spent by undergraduate medical students on pain education should be 74 hours.<sup>1</sup>

When pain education is given, the survey reveals that traditional teaching methods are used (lectures, case studies) which tend to focus on knowledge acquisition and encourage surface rather than deep learning or skill development. Overall, undergraduate pain education was found to be patchy and inconsistent across and within all healthcare disciplines.

The need to increase the amount of time dedicated to education on pain management is supported by the recently published CMO report, which recommended training in chronic pain to be included in the curricula of all healthcare professionals. The report highlighted that pain is one of the world's most common symptoms, but that chronic pain and its consequences are not being controlled as they could be.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Douglas Justins, Dean of the Faculty of Pain Medicine at the Royal College of Anaesthetists commented, 'By raising awareness of the limited amount of basic pain education offered to many students, it is hoped that we can work towards including pain as a core part of the healthcare curriculum within all UK universities and training programmes. The number of people in the UK with pain far outnumbers those with heart problems, yet the resources allocated to cardiac care are far superior. We hope that this research will help to correct this inequality by encouraging a renewed focus on improving the resources allocated to pain management. This will ensure that patients with chronic pain receive the same high level of care offered to people with other similarly debilitating conditions.'

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate by Pöyhiä R, Kelso E. Pain related undergraduate teaching in medical faculties in Finland. *Pain* 1999;79:121-5.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer, *Pain: Breaking Through the Barrier, 150 years of the Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer: On the state of public health 2008*, 16 March 2009. [http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_096233.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_096233.pdf)

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### **BPS**

Established in 2007, the Pain Education Special Interest Group (SIG) is a Society Special Interest Group of the British Pain Society.

As a multiprofessional group the objectives of the Pain Education SIG are to:

- Raise awareness of the need for pain education for healthcare professionals at undergraduate and postgraduate levels
- Enhance the skills of those involved in delivering pain education, including the skills of teaching and assessment
- Share knowledge and promote the dissemination of different educational methods and technologies available to deliver pain education
- Contribute to the educational objectives of the British Pain Society (BPS) and the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP).

### **For further information, please contact:**

Ken Obbard

Tel: 020 7269 7840

Email: [kenobbard@britishpainsociety.org](mailto:kenobbard@britishpainsociety.org)