



MEDIA RELEASE

Researchers at Neuroscience Research Australia have identified new evidence for a pain personality

Thursday, 10 August 2017: Researchers at Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA) and Macquarie University have identified new evidence for a pain personality in a review of 120 years of research which will be published in October 2017 in the Scandinavian Journal of Pain.

Understanding the relationship between pain and personality is a new frontier in understanding the complexity of Pain, in a larger research project being led by Dr Sylvia Gustin at NeuRA. Understanding pain, and why some people respond differently to treatment, may offer a new dialogue for people suffering from pain.

The review by Naylor, Boag, and Gustin provides important insights into the chronic pain experience and helps to explain complex presentations which through more informed interpretation may improve treatment.

“We know when someone experiences physical trauma to the brain, their personality can change dramatically,” Dr Gustin said.

Advances in brain imaging techniques have made it possible to explore more subtle brain changes, which may result in similar alterations in personality in chronic pain sufferers. Naylor, Boag and Gustin identified two common personality traits in people living with chronic pain; higher levels of harm-avoidance and lower levels of self-directedness.

“In previous research, Dr Gustin had identified structural differences in the brain in chronic pain sufferers compared to healthy controls,” Ms Naylor said.

“This difference was found in brain areas underpinning personality traits and results indicated that brain differences may reflect changes in personality.

Identifying pain personalities in chronic pain sufferers may help to categorise and treat sufferers more resistant to treatment, more prone to comorbidity and more vulnerable to entering the vicious cycle of chronic pain, suffering, and disability.

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Dr Sylvia Gustin is available for further comment via Katrina Usman.