



Australian Association of Musculoskeletal Medicine

Media release

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More prevention and training needed to combat \$6 billion disease, musculoskeletal doctors warn

It's a disease that costs Australian taxpayers \$6 billion annually and causes millions of Australians pain and disability — but with more focus on prevention and additional training for health professionals, the “huge burden” of musculoskeletal disease could be reduced, the Australian Association of Musculoskeletal Medicine (AAMM) said today.

AAMM is urging more GPs to undertake additional training in musculoskeletal conditions and make prevention a priority.

“More than 7 million Australians live with musculoskeletal pain” AAMM spokesperson, Dr Damien Nevin, said.

“Some of the most common types include arthritis, muscle strain and chronic low back pain. It is essential that doctors can accurately diagnose specific musculoskeletal conditions and make the best decisions on treatment.

“Musculoskeletal disease is often painful and can severely limit a patient’s lifestyle, including their ability to work, yet there is a paucity of training about it in medical school.

“While many musculoskeletal conditions are partly genetic, Australians can take big steps every day to minimise the impact.

“Most musculoskeletal doctors are GPs with additional training and qualifications, working ‘on the coal face’ in primary care.

“We treat the pain and dysfunction in bones, muscles and joints (the musculoskeletal organ) in collaboration with our colleagues — allied health professionals, GPs and specialists.

“While prevention is critical, we also give pain and disability relief through many treatment modalities including the mobilisation and manipulation of joints, exercise-based therapy, injection therapy, nerve blocks, and cognitive behaviour therapy.

“We make treatment decisions after undertaking a detailed history, full musculoskeletal examination and application of the best evidence.

“However, prevention is best and we always give the clear messages to our patients of:

- staying active - your ‘musculoskeletal organ’ loves to move and hates a ‘couch potato’ lifestyle
- losing some weight and maintaining a healthy weight range
- having a better diet - keeping the gut microbiome happy
- avoiding injury at work, home and in sports, and ensuring you don’t overload your muscles and joints

“One fifth of an average GP’s workload includes musculoskeletal problems. It is essential for GPs to gain extra skills in this area as training is minimal in their undergraduate years.

“AAMM has developed a post-graduate certificate for GPs in musculoskeletal disorders. Over 100 GPs have already commenced the course, and our first 16 doctors have now graduated.

“We believe that critically-needed extra training will help patients, reduce investigations, and reduce the economic and social burden of musculoskeletal disease.

“Crucially, we want the ‘chant’ of preventative action to become a common element of the discussion between health professionals and their patients in consultation rooms across Australia, as this would make a huge difference in outcomes for patients with this often painful and debilitating condition.”

Further information:

For further information about musculoskeletal disease and its treatment, and the courses and workshops offered by AAMM, visit www.aamm.org.au.

Information about musculoskeletal conditions can also be found at the website of Musculoskeletal Australia, a consumer organisation supporting those with arthritis, osteoporosis, back pain, gout and over 150 other musculoskeletal conditions — visit www.msk.org.au.

Available for interview:

Dr Damien Nevin (AAMM spokesperson) — 0427 689 125

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