

Introduction to the Symposium on Pain Medicine



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This issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* includes the beginnings of an ambitious series of articles spanning the broad field of pain medicine. A nationally and internationally recognized group of leading pain experts has been assembled to author a series of articles specifically tailored for a general medical readership. This perspective is important because most patients with medical and surgical conditions associated with pain receive care in a general medical setting.^{1,2}

Since 1998, pain medicine has been a recognized medical subspecialty certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties. According to the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, pain medicine is a “discipline of medicine [specializing] in the [care] of patients suffering from acute or chronic pain, or pain in patients requiring palliative care.”^{3,p1} Physicians successfully completing residencies in anesthesiology, physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, or psychiatry are eligible for board certification after completion of a 1-year accredited fellowship training program. However, many physicians in other specialties, such as family medicine, internal medicine, surgery, and emergency medicine, elect to do pain medicine fellowships under the auspices of one of the aforementioned specialties. Currently, there are 96 accredited civilian and 4 accredited armed forces fellowship training programs in the United States, and approximately 265 physicians successfully complete training annually.

Pain is a ubiquitous component of human existence, and it is encountered in medical practice on a daily basis. This is reflected in the Global Burden of Disease 2010 study, in which low-back pain was reported to be the leading cause of years lived with disability, with neck pain ranked number 4.⁴ Despite decades of work, the taxonomy of pain remains underdeveloped⁵⁻⁸; however, many experts choose to categorize pain syndromes as musculoskeletal, inflammatory, or neuropathic. Neuropathic pain also encompasses central pain states that result from lesions or disease processes of the central nervous system.⁹ The articles in the Symposium are generally organized around these broad categories for 2 important reasons.

First, these categories allow many commonly occurring pain syndromes to be grouped together. For example, patients with musculoskeletal low-back or neck pain can be grouped together and distinguished from patients with neuropathic pain stemming from diabetic peripheral neuropathy. Second, the principal pathophysiologic mechanisms that contribute to pain vary among the specified groups, although there is significant overlap. This is clinically important because awareness of the underlying pathogenesis could drive diagnostic decisions and selection of the most appropriate treatments. However, it is important to recognize that many commonly occurring pain syndromes have characteristics of more than 1 category; most notable is radicular spine pain, whereby patients frequently exhibit signs and symptoms of both musculoskeletal and neuropathic pain.

The inaugural article of the Symposium on Pain Medicine published in this issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* highlights the epidemiologic features and broad economic impact of pain.¹⁰ This article is intended to set the stage for subsequent articles on commonly occurring pain syndromes, including chronic low-back and neck pain, neuropathic pain, fibromyalgia and functional pain states, central pain states, cancer-related pain, and headache. In addition to the articles focused on specific pain syndromes, the Symposium on Pain Medicine also includes articles pertaining to potentially controversial or underrecognized treatment modalities, including prescription opioid analgesics, behavioral interventions, and complementary and alternative therapies. Finally, the series includes an article that focuses on the pioneering research that has elucidated the mechanisms responsible for the transition of acute to chronic pain and another article that highlights recent advances in pain genetics.

This current endeavor extends the long and rich tradition of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* in developing and promoting high-quality educational materials for primary care specialists.¹¹⁻¹⁶ At the completion of the Symposium on Pain Medicine series, we will explore collating the articles into a single volume to function as a resource for use in a general medical setting. However, most important, through the *Mayo*

Clinic Proceedings Symposium on Pain Medicine, it is anticipated that clinicians will expand their knowledge of pain medicine, which could lead to improvements in the care of patients with pain.

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