

Interventional radiology for pain management Advertising Feature

Getting straight to the points of pain

Minimally invasive with maximum benefit is how interventional radiologists (IRs) describe pinpoint precise pain treatment administered under advanced image guidance.

By correlating clinical signs to imaging features, when appropriate, these imaging techniques allow IRs to precisely target pain generators.

Such precise targeting for pain management is gaining traction as a treatment option for people suffering acute pain and those living with chronic pain.

Describing pain as a debilitating condition taking away independence and significantly reducing quality of life, Dr Glen Schlaphoff, director of Spectrum Medical Imaging Interventional clinics in Sydney, says the minimally invasive, well-focused procedures have a profound effect.

"Pain is a real blight on the community and people come to us seeking interventions that change what they're experiencing," he says.

"For those who have been suffering for a long time, being able to treat pain with sustained relief is life-changing."

While IR may be better known for procedures such as embolisation, angiography, placing stents, balloon angioplasty and biopsies, it offers clinical management for a wide range of conditions.

These include non-cancerous enlargements of the prostate or uterus (fibroids) and vein problems such as varicocele, pelvic congestion, varicose veins and deep vein thrombosis.

IR is also used to inject beads loaded with chemotherapy or radiation into cancers such as liver cancer.



Dr Glen Schlaphoff (pictured, above) says precisely treating pain can give sustained relief and be life-changing for sufferers.

In pain management, interventional radiology reduces pain by targeting associated inflammation in joints and soft tissues, temporarily or permanently blocking unpleasant nerve sensations.

The most common interventions involve injecting very small amounts of high concentration cortisone, either via ultrasound or by CT guidance, into and around damaged areas where pain is generated, such as in the spine, joints and tendons.

For severe pain resulting from cancers including breast and lung cancers spread to bone, cryoablation – essentially creating "balls of ice" – is used radiologically to turn off the nerves being stimulated by metastatic deposits, through the influence of extreme coldness, says Dr Schlaphoff.



Another treatment option, vertebroplasty, is used to significantly reduce spinal fracture pain. A leading cause of loss of independent lifestyle in Australia, spinal fractures are more common in the

elderly, particularly among women.

Dr Schlaphoff says traditional surgery in the older, frailer community is often not possible. There is, for example, risk of the spine collapsing due to age-associated osteoporosis.

However, he says, within the first six weeks of injury, vertebroplasty can cement a fracture, reducing further collapse and, importantly, reducing the fracture pain without the need for lengthy hospital stays.

Involving the injection of a toothpaste-like cement into the bone fractures, vertebroplasty fills the fracture cracks, locking the bone and returning its strength. Further, patients may sit up in bed and mobilise in as little as 20 minutes after the procedure, he says.

It is this expediency, along with its targeted nature and on-the-spot visualisation by an imaging specialist, that is leading people to seek interventional radiology as a pain treatment option.

"Interventional radiology offers us the ability to marry clinical presentation to imaging with immediate, appropriately targeted treatment," Dr Schlaphoff says.

"Image guidance ensures we won't damage adjacent organs and vital structures that may lie in the path of treatment. We are essentially targeting the site of pain within millimetre accuracy, providing patients with instant relief."

"Such interventions not only allow patients to return early to daily activities, they also offer significant healthcare cost reductions for patients and the broader health system."

Spectrum Medical Imaging and Interventional Radiology

Spectrum Medical Imaging is an independent radiology practice which provides state-of-the-art imaging services across Eastern and South Western Sydney. Our radiologists have subspecialist fellowship training in diagnostic & interventional radiology in all fields.

Spectrum Interventional Radiology has established an integrated clinical service for Interventional Radiology at Liverpool Private Hospital. This covers both major hospital procedures, which may require pre-operative consultations and minor outpatient procedures.



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