New residency program for pain specialists

Roughly one-quarter of Canadians suffer from some degree of chronic pain, and for those over the age of 60, the figure is closer to 50%. But according to Dr. Pat Morley-Forster, a professor in the department of anesthesiology and perioperative medicine at Western University in London, Ont., most practitioners’ training focuses almost entirely on acute, not chronic pain.

Now, after almost a decade of planning, Western has launched Canada’s first residency program in pain management. “We were able to demonstrate that there was a wealth of knowledge out there about how to treat pain that was not being taught to doctors. This unmet need would take two full years of doctor training,” said Morley-Forster, who is also the chair of the special committee on pain management at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

The program at Western is modelled after similar ones that have been operating in Australia since 1999 and the United Kingdom since 2002. Residents can access the subspecialty program through prior certification in anesthesia, neurology, psychiatry, physical and rehabilitative medicine, palliative care, rheumatology, pediatrics or emergency medicine.

Residents will complete 12 one-month rotations in a multidisciplinary clinic, compulsory rotations in psychiatry, with an emphasis on addiction medicine, and rotations in pediatric, cancer and acute pain.

“A resident may decide not to specialize in chronic pain, but will instead select cancer pain, or chronic non-cancer pain. The program is open-ended enough that residents can pick up that smaller than 1 square millimeter — was first described in 1990, but development has proven difficult. The potential for low-income countries is enormous says James Fraser of ChipCare, a University of Toronto engineering spin-off working on a hand-held blood analyzer that health workers could use to do CD4 counts required for ongoing AIDS treatment. Like other global health innovators, ChipCare engineers are Grand Challenges Canada beneficiaries, raising over $2 million last year from Grand Challenges and other investors, but the road from the lab to the village could still be long. — Miriam Shuchman, Toronto, Ont.
