

S'pore part of regional pain association

PAIN associations in South-east Asia are coming together to form a regional group to promote awareness of the importance of relieving patients' pain, as well as training and research in the field.

The associations in five countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore — will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding to form the Association of South-east Asian Pain Societies tomorrow at the opening of a two-day scientific meeting on pain here.

The inspiration for the group came from seeing what a similar one in Europe managed to achieve at an international meeting a few years ago.

The European group carried out a study in 12 member countries and found that 18 per cent of respondents suffered from chronic pain, or pain that lasted longer than six months.

The study also found that patients were seven times more likely to change jobs because of their chronic pain, resulting in significant economic and social costs.

Based on these results, the group plans to campaign for the right for pain relief to be included as a basic human right under European legislation.

In Australia, meanwhile, about 15 to 20 per cent of the population has been found to suffer chronic pain, while the number in the United States is as high as one in four, said two experts here for the meeting, Dr Tim Semple of the Royal Adelaide Hospital and Professor Kathleen Foley of New York's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre.

Such research has also led to the World Health Organisation and the International Association for the Study of Pain to declare Oct 11 as the first Global Day Against Pain.

In contrast to these countries, pain is not as widely recognised as a medical condition in the region, and such data is lacking, said Dr Cynthia Goh, president of the Pain Association of Singapore.

Pain management is also not recognised here as an area in which doctors can sub-specialise, said Dr Yeo Sow Nam, director of Singapore General Hospital's pain management and acupuncture services.

Prof Foley added that patients also need to be made more aware of the issue.

She said: "Patients often think that they should suffer in silence and not complain. But, actually, most of them can be treated with simple and inexpensive medication."

She will be speaking at a public forum on the patient's right to pain relief and what can be done to relieve pain.

The forum will be held at Raffles City Convention Centre at 3.30pm on Sunday. Admission is \$5.