

Media Release

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Private Healthcare Australia
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Consumers urged to be cautious about spinal cord stimulators for pain

Australians pursuing treatment for pain should seek independent information about the risks and benefits of spinal cord stimulators because they often do more harm than good.

CEO of Private Healthcare Australia Dr Rachel David said a survey of consumers published today by Pain Australia should be interpreted with extreme caution because it was commissioned and fully funded by the Neuromodulation Society of Australia - a group representing the providers of spinal cord stimulators.

The 'Pain Australia Spinal Cord Stimulator Implants Consumer Experience Report' details the experiences of 73 people who have received spinal cord stimulators, of which 63 were selected by doctors who make a living from implanting the devices. The other 10 people responded to a social media call for participants.

"This is not medical research. It is a small carefully selected sample of patient stories designed to spruik the continual use of expensive spinal cord stimulators which are known to cause more pain and suffering for a large proportion of the people who receive them,' Dr David said.

"If you are considering spinal cord stimulation, it is not a magic bullet. Talk to your GP about respected [Cochrane Reviews](#) that summarise legitimate research about it."

"This is a billion-dollar industry that some doctors and medical technology companies profit from, so any consumer research funded by that industry must be heavily scrutinised."

Spinal cord stimulators* are devices surgically inserted into a person's back to send low levels of electricity directly into the spine to attempt to relieve pain. Australian health insurance data shows 1351 spinal cord stimulator procedures were done in Australia over the past year and that 27 per cent of people required revision surgery due to complications. The average cost of the procedure is \$58,377.

"PHA is disappointed that Pain Australia has put its name to a report that was commissioned, funded and designed by people with a vested interest in selling these devices and procedures to people living with chronic pain," Dr David said.

"Consumer research is critical to improve healthcare, but this survey is marketing in disguise. We agree with Pain Australia that more needs to be done to address pain in the community. However, bad science such as this is a barrier to developing better options for the millions of Australians living with chronic pain."

*Spinal cord stimulation is also sometimes referred to as neuromodulation.

Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's private health insurance industry. PHA represents 21 Australian health funds with a combined membership of over 14.7 million Australians, or 98% of the sector on membership.

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