

Nociplastic Pain: Do We Need a 3rd Descriptor?

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Pain has traditionally been regarded as a symptom of tissue injury or disease/lesion in the nervous system, i.e., nociceptive or neuropathic pain. However, certain forms of chronic pain are best regarded as a disease in their own right, i.e. primary pain. In October 2017 the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) decided to revise the classification system of chronic pain by adding a third mechanistic descriptor, nociplastic pain, in addition to the terms nociceptive and neuropathic. The third mechanistic descriptor, nociplastic pain, defined as pain that arises from altered nociception, permits the mechanistic classification of “primary” pain. The new matrix of IASP mechanistic terms, nociceptive, neuropathic, nociplastic and pain of unknown origin will be presented along with a discussion how these terms should be used in the clinic. The presentation will provide an overview of the variety of pain conditions associated with nociplastic pain and the potential clinical and scientific usefulness of the new term. The underlying pathophysiological mechanisms as well as clinical signs and symptoms in nociplastic pain will be presented. The transition from nociceptive to nociplastic musculoskeletal pain, how it can be recognized, and the relevance for treatment will be discussed.