Response to Letter from Drs. Quintner, Buchanan, and Cohen

To the Editor,

The moralizing and dismay expressed by Quintner and colleagues seems to be aimed more directly at pain terminology concepts advanced by the American Academy of Pain Medicine, and not our review of the topic itself including our conclusion that use of the term maldynia does not currently provide any additional prognostic or treatment value over use of the term neuropathic pain. Their viewpoint also fails to acknowledge some fundamental scientific facts. It is difficult to argue that physiological, neurobiological, and neuroimmune distinctions are not apparent among the mechanisms and pathways that are activated during an acute, nociceptive pain response, and those that accompany more profound neural injury. The clinical relevance of these differences will begin to diminish when the neurobiology of neural injury is better understood, and effective primary and secondary interventions become available. Rather than declaring that “an emotive description of a person’s pain as ‘bad’ could easily add to the burden carried by an already stigmatized section of the community,” the concept of maldynia may have some additional value by allowing patients the opportunity to better grasp the impact of changes in their nervous system and to minimize prevailing pejorative and judgmental viewpoints regarding their experience of persistent pain. We acknowledge that terminology issues can be difficult to address on an international basis, particularly where a gold standard is absent and culture-related issues such as “good” and “bad” might well be interpreted differently. However, you might compare this with the concept of “good” drinking (drinking in moderation, up to two drinks a day for cardiac health) vs “bad” drinking (drinking to excess, despite poor health). The approach taken within the article is consistent with the rubric used with other disorders and represents a reasonable medical and logical structure within which to address the issues at stake. That’s not to say that it’s the only approach possible or that other approaches should be ignored.

Sincerely,

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