

# Valorization



One in five adult Europeans suffers from chronic pain, which often has a severe impact on sleep quality, mood, daily functioning, work and quality of life.<sup>34</sup> Pain with neuropathic characteristics is generally more severe, and is associated with worse health, in each measured dimension compared to for example nociceptive pain. Health-related quality of life in individuals with neuropathic pain is rated as low as in individuals having depression, coronary artery disease, recent myocardial infarction, or poorly controlled diabetes.<sup>35</sup>

In the medical world, pain has longtime been perceived as a symptom, but is increasingly recognized as a 'disease in its own right'.<sup>36</sup> As a singular entity, chronic pain is subject to a global evolution in modern medicine: tailor made treatment focusing on the individual patient. Clifford Woolf, professor in neurobiology at Harvard University, stated at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that in order to achieve this goal, 'we should gain better understanding of the pathophysiology of pain and various pain conditions'.<sup>37</sup>

ACNES is but a small part in a myriad of pain conditions that received much attention in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nevertheless, these patients have ever so much right to benefit from new or increasingly effective treatment strategies. This right obliges the clinician to analyze empirically proven treatments in an evidence based fashion and to design studies possibly elucidating underlying pathophysiological mechanisms of the syndrome.

This thesis may have direct implications on treatment algorithms, for example optimizing patient selection for neurectomy and the use of dorsal root ganglion spinal cord stimulation as a last resort option. It also points out remarkable findings in anatomical and epidemiological analysis of a large cohort of consecutive patients questioning the original nerve entrapment hypothesis. It has a rather limited health-economic contribution concerning the obsolete use of corticosteroids in injection therapy. Moreover, with its new own chapter accepted for inclusion in the Dutch Pain Guidelines, the diagnosis has gained much awareness in the field.

During the conception of this thesis, the first Dutch ACNES patient society was founded. Educated, young patients looking for information, recognition, counselling or solidarity from peers when current treatment modalities fail may benefit from such an institution. The definitive answer to 'What is ACNES' and tailor made therapy might still be far away, but initiatives like these form an important step to shared decision making and an inspiration to continue our research.